Doctor of Professional Studies
(Equine Assisted Leadership Development)

# FACILITATING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WITH HORSES: UNDERPINNINGS OF PRACTICE

*A project submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Professional Studies*

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# ABSTRACT

I am an Occupational Psychologist, leadership developer, facilitator and Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) practitioner with 20 years' experience. Working with horses to give leaders feedback on their presence and impact is one of the most effective methods I have ever used. Equine Assisted Leadership Development (EALD) is a powerful experiential and embodied learning method, but some practitioners are using it with little or no experience of developing leaders, facilitation or experiential learning. As the popularity of this form of development increases, the imperative to ensure that clients are being supported by credible and competent facilitators also increases. The purpose of this research is to understand how EALD is practiced currently, and to get an insight into how experienced practitioners think about facilitating leadership development with horses. By elucidating the underpinnings of the practice of facilitating leadership development with horses this research will contribute to the credibility of the field.

This thesis outlines the practitioner and academic knowledge landscape that gives the context of facilitation with horses, to provide an experiential element to leadership development. In order to get a deeper insight into practitioner's thought process, but also the lived experience of working in this way with horses, this research uses the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The embodied and emergent nature of the phenomenon meant that different ways to access that lived experience were needed. As such the data was gathered by drawing on an innovative combination of interviews and enhanced recall through video with seven experienced EALD practitioners.

This deeper understanding of how these established developers think and practice is then compared with what we already know about facilitating experiential learning with leaders to establish whether this method requires a new approach, or simply an adaption of existing ones. The key findings look at how the three superordinate themes of Theory of Facilitation, Practice of Facilitation and Theory of learning interweave and influence each other. The aspiration is that this research will support the development of practitioners through curriculum development and further increase the credibility of this potent approach to developing leaders.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## THE BACK STORY

It was late at night in 2010, I had been picked up at the airport after a work trip, and got chatting with the taxi driver. When he was not driving a taxi, he spent part of his year in India, running a programme for 18-24 year old's called 'finding your genius'. This was to prevent a generation wasting their talents on careers that were chosen by their parents, and ending up burnt out and unhappy by mid-life. The first question he often asked of those young people was: "What is it you do now that you could do until the day you die?" When he asked me that question, I was taken aback, but my immediate response was "I'm not sure, but it has got to have something to do with horses."

Within a couple of days I was standing in an arena with colleagues and a couple of horses having a taster experience of equine assisted learning. I can still remember standing there in boots and jeans with the sun on my skin, totally at home, thinking "this is it, this is what I could do until the day I die." From that time I set out to include equine assisted learning into my practice as a leadership developer. However, what I quickly realised was that the approach to developing people in this particular method was almost completely devoid of what I would call sophisticated or advanced facilitation skills.

I had already been a leadership developer and occupational psychologist for 12 years by this point, and I was working for a highly regarded management institute, Roffey Park. Roffey Park does not employ anyone who does not have good facilitation skills, and makes a point of developing its staff to further enhance those skills. If we are known for nothing else, it is the quality of our facilitation. So, even with all my knowledge, skills and experience, I still felt that I was not yet skilled enough to do this work well.

In fact to begin with, I saw my role as simply a translator of the feedback that the horses were giving. However, this was a red herring in terms of the role a facilitator plays. Yes, the horse and the feedback they provide is central to this method, but the facilitator's role is not simply that of a translator. Perhaps part of that was not wanting to get it 'wrong' and also not having seen any examples of others doing it particularly well either. It was only when I stopped looking for someone else to tell me what was unique about working with horses, and started to unpack my assumptions about what it meant to facilitate experiential learning, did I begin to recognize the important role of a facilitator. With the support of colleagues who were interested in other somatic approaches to leadership development, I began to incorporate this powerful method into my practice.

As part of a programme that uses Equine Assisted Leadership Development (EALD) as a core method, I did the following reflection:

*It is important to me that I am as skilled, present and wise as I can be. It is important that I fulfil my purpose of helping people return to wholeness. It is important that people have a 'wow' experience, moments of insight that remind them of who they really are beneath the layers of rubbish, fears and defenses; so that they too can connect with their purpose and shine brightly as they were always meant to. It matters to me as a developer that people have an experience that touches them, that touches what is core for them at the time. It matters that people feel supported and valued and stretched in a way that respects who they are. It matters that EALD is done well with the proper respect for the power of the approach and respect for the embodied wisdom of the horses who give of themselves unconditionally. I care about the safety of all who engage in this work. I care about the reputation of the field and that I get to do what makes my heart sing.*

At around this time I also worked with a potential associate to support me when doing EALD with larger groups. What became clear was that whilst the person talked the right language, the practice was sadly lacking. Their interventions came far too soon to allow the group to work things out, filling a space that should have been the clients'. The interventions were also quite cognitive rather than somatically orientated and there were lots of stories about their own learning journey, rather than focusing on what the clients needed. There was too much well-intentioned energy placed on doing, rather than being; showing how much was known, rather than genuinely being in service of the group. It was at this point, that I acknowledged to myself that I had some rather clear ideas about what it meant to facilitate well. This was despite the fact that I still felt like a relative novice when it came to EALD.

So, with the encouragement of colleagues and my peer Support and Challenge supervision group, I began to articulate this further. However, I did not just want to be another voice that was making claims as to how EALD should be done well. I wanted to have some rigour behind any assertions I made, but also wanted to explore what other ways EALD was practiced. This is what lead to the suggestion of 'well if you are going to do some research you may as well get a PhD out of it'. That was in 2013. In my position as one of only a handful of Equine Assisted Leadership Developers in the UK I was curious about how other practitioners practiced.

The original title of Developing Best Practice In Facilitation of Equine Assisted Leadership Development was agreed at the project approval panel stage. This was shifted slightly from my original formulation of 'Exploring Best Practice' in order to satisfy the need to add to the body of knowledge, not simply to explore what it is currently. However, I am aware that the idea of best practice in an arena that is so emergent, loses some of its meaning. That is why the title has now been reformulated to: "Facilitating Leadership Development with Horses: Underpinnings of Practice". I also realised that there was a value judgement implied in the term 'best practice', or even the slightly less loaded phrase of 'good practice'. Neither of which were truly compatible with the aims and outcomes of this research.

## THE RESEARCH

### PURPOSE

As a leadership developer, in my professional experience, experiential learning, particularly one taking an embodied approach, is an important part of the leadership development repertoire. Leaders, now more than ever, need to develop practical emotional intelligence to enable them to work relationally; through and with others by engagement and influence not command and control. The need for leaders to understand who they are when they are leading, and connect their 'being' with their 'doing' is becoming more pressing as the complexity and ambiguity of the world of work only increases. As Equine Assisted Leadership Development (EALD) is a growing method of providing that experiential learning for leaders, it was my concern that if this work was not done well, it may damage the credibility of this powerful approach. However, without understanding how it is practiced by experienced facilitators, there is no means of determining whether it is done 'well' or not. So, the big question is: "How is EALD practiced currently?"

### AIMS

- My first aim is to get a better understanding of how exemplars think about how they practice EALD.
    - What underpins how they facilitate this work?
    - What bodies of knowledge do they draw on?
    - Is it just facilitation or are there other fields that are important?

- The second main aim is to understand if there are similarities between how these exemplars approach EALD and existing theory and practice of facilitating experiential leadership development
    - What if anything can we learn from existing theory and practice?
    - What is unique to working with horses?
    - What does that mean for developing the practice of EALD?
- The third main aim is to create a generative conversation about what it means to do leadership development with horses well.
    - By articulating what common underpinnings and differences in application there are, less experienced practitioners could appreciate the depth of knowledge and skill that is involved.
    - To provide a window on the complexity that sits underneath the apparent simplicity of this practice.
    - To provide clear guidance for those practitioners who believe working with horses to provide experiential learning makes them pioneers and as such do not need to refer to other bodies of knowledge or sources of data.
    - Support the development of other practitioners
    - Support the credibility of the approach.

### Objectives

Key objectives are:

- Get clarity on what underpins the practice of EALD from different experienced practitioners
- Articulate the bodies of knowledge they are drawing from
- Look at the similarities and differences between the practice of EALD and existing theory and practice of facilitating experiential learning with leaders.
- Set out a curriculum to provide the basis for a generative conversation on practitioner development.

### Outcomes

What I am seeking to do is to outline the existing practice in the facilitation of experiential leadership development, and the application of this when working with horses. I intend to share that with my participants in the research to ensure that the generative conversation in the wider EALD community is not just had with me. I also intend to use the information to develop a curriculum for a qualification in the facilitation of EALD. Finally I will share my knowledge and experience from this research more widely through my professional networks, trade publications and blogs. This will enable practitioners from the wider field of Leadership Development to contribute to the conversation.

All of this will have limited impact if the credibility of the method and how it is facilitated is not attended to in the wider Leadership Development environment. If those who are purchasing leadership development for their leaders are aware that doctoral level research has been carried out in how this particular type of experiential learning is facilitated, then that should help them feel confident that this is not simply another fad. Very few purchasers of leadership development that I have come across would argue against the benefits of experiential learning. However, the confidence to choose a method that involves horses may be lacking. If the approach to facilitating EALD is similar to other forms of experiential learning, then this should help to build that confidence. However, the necessity of checking out the experience of the facilitator still remains. I will use my

position at a leading management institute to promote the awareness of this approach and the power it has when facilitated well.

| | Aims | Objectives | Research Questions |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Get a better understanding of how exemplars think about how they practice EALD. | • Get clarity on what underpins the practice of EALD from different experienced practitioners<br>• Articulate the bodies of knowledge they are drawing from | • What underpins how they facilitate this work?<br>• What bodies of knowledge do they draw on?<br>• Is it just facilitation or are there other fields that are important?<br>• What role does the horse play and how is that different to other forms of experiential learning? |
| 2 | • Understand if there are similarities between how these exemplars approach EALD and existing theory and practice of facilitating experiential leadership development | • Look at the similarities and differences between the practice of EALD and existing theory and practice of facilitating experiential learning with leaders. | • What if anything can we learn from existing theory and practice?<br>• What is unique to working with horses?<br>• What does that mean for developing the practice of EALD? |
| 3 | • Create a generative conversation about what it means to do leadership development with horses well. | • Set out a curriculum to provide the basis for a generative conversation on practitioner development. | • What existing forms of developing facilitation could be drawn on?<br>• What would need to supplement this to support the development of practitioners in the field of EALD? |

**FIGURE 1: SUMMARY OF AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS**

## STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS

Chapter Two: Knowledge Landscape

What this chapter sets out are the stages of the journey I have been on in my understanding of what underpins the practice of EALD. It has given me a greater appreciation of all the bodies of knowledge I was explicitly and implicitly drawing on. As an occupational psychologist and leadership developer, this was more varied than I had first appreciated. I also gained a greater understanding of the wider underpinnings to Roffey Park's approach to facilitation and leadership development. What will also be explored in this chapter is how my knowledge landscape fits into the broader knowledge landscape, with particular reference to academic as well as practitioner literature.

Chapter Three: Methodology

As with any doctoral study, part of the intention is to develop the skills of research, such that one can confidently add to the body of knowledge in a professional field. The methodology chosen to do so best answers the fundamental questions of: 'What underpins the practice of facilitating leadership development with horses?' The experience of EALD for the client and the facilitator is a largely felt, embodied one, so a phenomenological approach has been taken. In order to capture the essence of that embodied, lived experience of the facilitator, both in depth interviews were used, and video to support enhanced recall. The power of using video to gain even greater depth of data and appreciation of the lived experience is explored. The chapter on methodology and methods explores the pros and cons of this kind of research and what needs to be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

Chapter Four: Findings

In keeping with a phenomenological approach, the findings have been grouped into superordinate themes, but have stayed as close to each research participant's lived experience as possible. The similarities and differences, the unique expressions and the commonalities have been captured in the findings chapter. Each main theme has been explored and articulated with quotes from each of the seven participants.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The discussion chapter explores the findings in more depth by relating them to the existing literature, and to other areas of literature not previously thought to be connected. In this chapter I look at what the different approaches to EALD are and what the findings add to the related fields of facilitation, learning in a leadership development context and equine assisted approaches. This begins to form a specific field in itself, i.e. Equine Assisted Leadership Development. This chapter concludes with a clear articulation of my renewed understanding of what underpins facilitating leadership development with horses.

Chapter Six: Impact

This chapter focuses on the implications of this research chart my development to date as EALD practitioner, but also my wider practice. This has an impact on what and how I work with clients, but it also looks at what I am doing to shape the whole field of EALD. It is important for me to enhance the credibility of this powerful method, and a strong thread within that is to support the development of practitioners who are skilled enough to do this work well.

Chapter Seven7: Reflections

This final chapter is a personal reflection on the process of this research, both as a practitioner and as a researcher.

# CHAPTER TWO: KNOWLEDGE LANDSCAPE

## OVERVIEW

The first part of this chapter will be to set out my own particular knowledge landscape. This will look at the predominantly practitioner sources that have influenced my practice to date. I have been a practicing developer for over 20 years now, and my personal and professional development has been on-going throughout that time. From that point, I will then move on to looking at other sources of literature that broadens the scope of this chapter. It will incorporate academic sources as well as more contemporary practitioner based ideas.

In conversation with colleagues I have come to the conclusion that this literature review needs to encompass three broad, overlapping areas: Facilitation, primarily the facilitation of leadership development; Learning to include adult education, experiential learning and development of leaders; and the less well developed Equine Assisted approaches to leadership development. My proposition at this stage is that the my own practice of EALD is underpinned by knowledge and experience in these areas.

An interesting question raised by one of my colleagues was whether the whole endeavour of Equine Assisted Leadership development was indeed a group activity or whether it was actually one to one coaching and not facilitation. My response had not previously been articulated, even to myself and brought into focus a number of things. So whilst on the whole there is a predominance of one to one activity with the horse, it may look like coaching, but there are group dynamics happening on a number of levels. The simple act of adding in a horse creates a different dynamic in the relationship, and the other participants are observing and having a learning experience, even in a seemingly passive role. My experience as a facilitator tells me that however many people are interacting with a horse at any given moment, this is a group experience and needs to be facilitated as such.

The reasoning for looking at the Equine Assisted literature is obvious, however, very little of that specifically takes the perspective of leadership development. Therefore placing this research into the context of experiential approaches to leadership development is important. Most literature that does look at equine assisted learning, sits in a more therapeutic context. (Burgon, et al., 2018; Borgi, 2016; Lac, 2016; Lee, et al., 2016; Voelpel, et al., 2018) Hence the need to look more closely at the parallel track of leadership development. How learning relates to fully functioning adults is an important area to consider, as an understanding of how adults learn will influence how experiences are facilitated. With an experience as potentially powerful as working with a horse, the need to understand how best to support the client in that experience is key.

It is important to note that there are some sources of literature that are related to equine assisted leadership development, however, they are in the popular literature and not in academic or peer reviewed journals. As such they are representative of different thinking and approaches, but are not always well supported by theory or robust critique. Nevertheless they do represent some perspectives that are prevalent in the field from a practitioner standpoint. These include Barbara Rector's book "Adventures in Awareness" (Rector, 2005) and Linda Kohanov whose titles include "Riding between the worlds" (Kohanov, 2003) and "The Power of the Herd" (Kohanov, 2013). As a practitioner on my own developmental journey, I was instinctively drawn to much of what these authors had to say. There was often a transpersonal dimension to the experiences described with horses. However, I did not get any further clarity about how either of these two, undoubtedly

sophisticated, practitioners worked in the moment. I did explore the possibility of training in the Epona method espoused by Linda Kohanov. My understanding was that much of it was based, at least initially, on using the work with the horses to resolve your own personal development issues prior to gaining insight in how to facilitate. Whilst I understand in principle the benefits of this approach, for an experienced Learning and Development professional in regular supervision, this approach did not suit my needs. I will explore in more depth later on in this chapter what influence I believe these practitioners have contributed to the wider Equine Assisted Learning field.

# MY KNOWLEDGE LANDSCAPE

## FACILITATION

The first area I want to explore, is perhaps my most familiar territory, that of facilitation. The International Association of Facilitators (IAF) do have a list of competencies (see appendix F), but they do not actually have one definition of what they mean by facilitation. In some respects this is heartening as it can mean many different things to different people in different contexts. A selection of the definitions found on their website illustrates this (Sipponen-Damonte, 2017). For example it can be seen as a structured session with predefined steps and outcomes or a method to promote healthy group collaboration. Equally it is characterised as an intervention by someone who is neutral and acceptable to the group; who helps them solve problems or make decisions more effectively; and potentially learn something new about themselves and the way the group works. Most of these definitions are in a group effectiveness context as opposed to a learning context. Whilst the skills may be similar, the context is more specific. This is a primary reason for my choice of Heron as a source for my practice as he was writing in that learning context.

### INFLUENCES- HERON

John Heron (Heron, 1999) is probably the single biggest source of inspiration and my practice bible. I have also used Trevor Bentley (2000) and others more recently as a way of making sense of what is happening and intervening in a group. I will briefly outline how Heron's approach has shaped my thinking and practice.

It is worth noting the context of much of Heron's work was the higher education sector in the 70's,80' and 90's. There was a particularly strong discourse at the time which was concerned with the politics of education. This included Paulo Freire and his book: 'The Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (Freire, 1970), Malcolm Knowles (Knowles, 1980) and Ian Cunningham (Cunningham, 1987) developing principles of self-managed learning. This latter approach is both implicit and explicit in my practice as it is fundamental to the way that Roffey Park thinks about learning. In fact Ian Cunningham was the CEO at Roffey Park from 1987-93, and his legacy is still very much in evidence.

Broadly speaking Heron was working in a humanistic tradition which treats the learner as a whole person; their thoughts, experiences, self-concept, beliefs, feelings, desires and motivations. For Heron, the '…facilitator is a midwife eliciting the emergence of self-directed and peer, holistic learning.' (p5). I think at the time Heron was writing, I would agree that most people have been trained to learn in a largely cognitive way, almost entirely ignoring the data from body, emotions or intuition. However, that may not necessarily be the case for much longer. There has been an interest in more integrated ways of learning, for example mindfulness, yoga and martial arts based leadership training (Strozzi-Heckler, 2007) (Hamill, 2013; Rigg, 2018).

Whilst I agree in principle that developing whole, self-directed, emotionally and spiritually intelligent human beings is a good thing, there seems to be a benign tyranny in his approach. Who am I to determine at what level someone needs to learn? In particular he was coming from a philosophical perspective that feelings were the ground from which all else springs (Heron, 1992). His approach is attentive to the politics of education in terms of who is seen as holding the power as to what constitutes knowledge and learning. He also places an emphasis on the emotional life of a group and how the facilitator attends to that. His stance is both philosophically and practically grounded, but not empirically so. Very little of his work has been put into peer reviewed journals and so not subject to that rigour. It is also very broad and thorough; encompassing and going well beyond the core competencies as set out by the IAF.

### Continuum of styles

It is with the awareness that Heron had a particular philosophical stance that I will outline which aspects of Heron have most influenced my practice. Firstly, his continuum of facilitator styles which ranges from hierarchical, through co-operative to autonomous is fundamental to my practice. An aim of humanistic approaches to learning is to create autonomous learners, i.e. part of the role of the facilitator is to teach people how to learn for themselves. There are some assumptions about this, particularly that the teaching and learning will take place over an extended period of time. This means that the goal of a fully autonomous approach is achievable, but that it may take time. I would question whether it is ever fully possible, or indeed desirable. Groups can become self-facilitating, but the role of an external facilitator to create a safe space, to legitimise the time and to hold up a mirror or point out potential blind spots, is still valuable.

I operationalise this continuum specifically with groups by thinking about what this group of capable adults can do for themselves, and what might they need me to do for them. This continuum might be about power, control and responsibility, but it can also be about safety, expediency and the need to scaffold or role model behaviours so that learning can occur effectively. I am always attentive to when and how I can cede more control and responsibility to the group. This may seem trite, but even a simple structure such as asking the group to form smaller sub groups can be an opportunity for ceding responsibility and encouraging active learning engagement. However, it can still be a struggle to get a group of leaders to choose an appropriate method rather than relying on the facilitator to do it for them. I hold the question of what is the group capable of and not *yet* capable of doing for themselves throughout an interaction with a client group. This is particularly true when working with a group and horses for the first time, as safety is a key consideration. They may be capable adults, but they may not have sufficient knowledge or skill to make informed choices in some areas.

### Intervention Categories

The second area of Heron's approach is his intervention categories, these are essentially:

- Planning – who decides the topic, outcomes, methods etc.
- Structure – design of the activity, session or event(s)
- Feeling – paying attention to the emotional life of the group and supporting positive emotional processes
- Meaning – how a person or group makes sense of their experience
- Confronting – providing challenge to thinking, perceptions, beliefs etc.
- Valuing – showing respect and appreciation for the learner as a whole human being

In practice all of these ways of intervening are woven in to each interaction with a group. All of them can and are done either with the facilitator in control (Hierarchically), co-operatively which is a joint endeavour, or autonomously where the group or learner intervenes in one of the above categories spontaneously. As a facilitator, I am consciously choosing to intervene, prompting an intervention to happen or to wait to let an intervention emerge from the group or individual. With EALD, this is partly driven by safety and partly driven by the final element of Heron, which is his perspective on types of learning or ways of knowing.

### Ways of Knowing

Heron looks at how the facilitator can support the learner through both individuating and participatory aspects of experiential learning. This is similar to a particular take on adult development. "It is best understood as a framework that portrays the growth of individuals as moving into ever greater awareness and integration about both the inner and the outer world." (Cook-Greuter, 2013, p. 4) . The interesting thing for me is that she emphasizes the fact that this theory of development focuses on the evolving sophistication of meaning making. It is about the levels of awareness of both internal processes and external environment, culture etc. According to Cook- Greuter the conventional stages of development such as Expert and Achiever seek to differentiate (or individuate) themselves through knowledge or approach, whereas the post-conventional ego stages are more focused on what Torbert (2005) describes as 'mutuality'.

So whilst Heron seems to say that there is the possibility for both individuating and participatory aspects of his four stages of the learning cycle, it would seem that the likelihood of accessing the participatory elements only increases as maturity increases. And as Torbert points out, this is a lifetime's work and may not happen for large parts of the management population. So, as a facilitator, it may only be possible to notice what ways learners have of making sense of their experience and to adapt their approach accordingly. So perhaps the next place to explore with Heron is his meaning making dimension.

### Heron and Meaning Making

"To learn properly is to understand and to rehearse that understanding so that it becomes influential from its base in memory." (Heron, 1999, p. 99) It seems that when an experience as visceral as working with horses is used as the vehicle for this 'proper learning' then it seems to embed more easily in the memory. The trick is to help that experience become influential from that base. Heron's chapter on meaning (p's 99-116) might offer some insight as to why the whole experience of EAL is so powerful. The four types of understanding mirror his typology of learning; from practical to experiential. However, he advocates for the mediating role of the imaginal between conceptual and practical. I would indeed say that it mediates between the experiential as well. Heron gives the example of the role the imaginal plays between someone describing how to play a golf swing and being able to configure one's own body through the imagination as a way to translate it in to the physical or practical. Whilst working with horses in an EALD context is not about the skill of horsemanship, the feedback given by the horses when even the smallest change is made by the participant, creates a powerful link.

Even though Heron would say that a facilitator always has the choice to move anywhere along his continuum of where power and responsibility fits; I struggle to see why a facilitator would need to use hierarchical meaning making when working with a horse. Whilst there are no doubt biological or zoological interpretations of equine behaviour with claims to veracity, that's not really the point. The horses' main function is to provide live data, unbiased feedback in the form of physical responses to the learner. Therefore, it is more about what meaning the participant makes in conjunction with the horse, rather than there being any sense of objective truth. Even my knowledge as a horsewoman and as a leadership developer can only ever be part of the story. In my experience, any understanding or meaning is fragile as learners are encountering the horses on a somatic and limbic

level. They often struggle to articulate the felt sense, so any interpretation, mine or theirs, has to be tentative.

I find myself using some of the techniques that Heron mentions, such as bringing attention to micro cues and what he calls mimicry, but only after the participant and the other observers have talked about what they have noticed. I am making choices for the learner in that I am noticing things they may not have, or I am privileging the data from the horse. However, it is in order to raise their awareness beyond what they can yet do for themselves. The intent is to be co-operative, as all but a few people are totally unself-aware, or incapable of making sense of their experience. I, more often than not, use more of what Heron would describe as co-operative tools such as simply describing behaviour and inviting imaginal or resonant sense making "What's happening for you right now?" "What does this situation remind you of?" "Where are you feeling X? Can you give it a weight, texture or other kind of quality?"

### Meaning making – special considerations

There is a special consideration though, that may or may not hold water. I first came across the idea of a Borderland Personality (Bernstein, 2005), a number of years ago after a strange encounter with a horse. Jerome Bernstein was a Jungian Analyst who became fascinated by developments in consciousness and certain people's ability to tune into non-ordinary experiences, particularly related to nature and animals. The experience was briefly that, whilst riding down a country lane I became overwhelmed by a feeling of loneliness, so much so that I almost started to cry. I started to look around me to see if anything might have sparked such a strong emotional reaction. After a few minutes I spotted a horse, alone in a field. Horses are by nature herd animals, living on their own is unnatural. I was convinced that I had somehow picked up on that horse's emotional state before having become consciously aware of its presence. Quite perturbed I sought out a therapist who mentioned Bernstein's work and said that kind of response was totally normal for a Borderland personality.

I have, on occasion, had similar experiences with my own horse whilst working with groups. I have offered it as a tentative insight e.g. "I might be way off beam here, but I'm getting a sense of sadness from Cherry. Does that resonate with you at all?" at the time the response was a slightly puzzled, "No, don't think so". On a follow up day, the participant reported that after some reflection the insight was spot on, but that she had hidden it from herself as she was in 'coping mode' and had not wanted to acknowledge her grief. I amm not sure where these insights come from, or claiming any special ability. They are useful, but again, are only ever part of the sense making process and not given special status. Perhaps there is a further area of study that would look at whether horses have more complex emotions than would just be involved in fight or flight, and whether transference and projection were possible both ways.

### Emotions and emotional defence mechanisms

What this example highlights is that one of the aspects of working this way is that meaning, perceptions, assumptions and self-concept can all be fundamentally challenged. This often gives rise to a host of emotions and their attendant healthy and unhealthy processes. Heron points out again that the affective dimension has both feelings (participatory) and emotions which are individuating as they normally derive from our ego desires and whether they are being met or not. "Feeling to mean the capacity of the person to participate in what is here and now…" p199. For me as a developer, helping groups and individuals become more aware of and capable of dealing productively with what is happening within and between themselves is fundamental to emotional intelligence and self-management. (Goleman, 1998). This connects to other meaning making schema such as Bruner (1996) or Cook-Greuter (2013) amongst others for a developmental perspective. His work has lots of resonances with the developmental maturity work of William Torbert (Torbert, 2005) which is an interesting idea to which I will return.

To work with horses is an invitation to be conscious of who you are at a feeling level and to work cleanly with whatever emotions are coming up for you in the moment. Particularly early on in an intervention, with horses or without them, if EQ is generally poor, then there is a need to be explicit about drawing attention to emotions, helping learners to identify, own and accept them. Heron also talks about recognising the unhealthy emotional processes or defence mechanisms. My understanding of and ability to recognise and work with these processes is a key part of what helps me maintain a safe psychological space. It is also interesting that Heron advocates highlighting the existence of projection and transference. I have not yet explored this with horses though it has come up a number of times. These particular concepts have their roots in a psychodynamic approach. So, whilst I may become aware of them as potential emotional processes, and may choose to offer an observation based on that, they are not worked with in any kind of pseudo therapeutic way.

### IN SUMMARY OF FACILITATION

In reviewing what underpins my practice of facilitation, I still hold to many of Heron's principles and approaches in my thinking, but have adapted them somewhat in practice. These adaptations have been predominantly in response to the different context that I operate in i.e. leadership development in the 21st century. Heron was working in a higher education context, in the last stages of the previous millennium. So whilst learning and (young) adults are common, the imperatives of business across all three sectors, and the increasingly complex and global nature of the world of work, are different. The nature of leadership development, with an emphasis on performance, productivity as well as potential, creates a different dynamic to the learning contract.

I have also recognised that, whilst there are many similarities between Heron's approach and Trevor Bentley (Op.Cit), it is the latter which now influences my equine practice more. Bentley's emphasis on attending to the self, the group and the field within which both sit, is more useful when working with horses. His gestalt underpinnings give greater focus to the immediate, felt experience as data. His approach works more explicitly with emergence and creating safety in the group through the presence of the facilitator. So it would seem that the depth and thoroughness of Heron is the cognitive complexity, with Bentley's approach as the simplicity of practice that is on the far side of it.

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

I will briefly outline how my understanding of experiential learning from Heron, has been instrumental in the way that I think about facilitating development of leaders, particularly when working with horses.

**Heron's approach to experiential learning**

I think I was probably introduced to Heron and David Kolb (Kolb, 1984) at roughly the same time, which was early on in my development as a facilitator of leadership development. I took a rather uncritical approach to Kolb at the time and saw it as a useful model that helped me think about how to structure a learning intervention and design a programme for clients. It was only later, whilst at Roffey Park and starting to working with more embodied approaches to leadership and learning, did I take a second look at Heron's approach.

What it opened up for me were deeper levels of sense-making and a whole approach to knowledge that was not conceptual, practical or indeed linguistically expressed. The idea that the first level of knowing, what Heron refers to as experiential, the immediate, visceral, physical sensations associated with an experience, has turned out to be particularly useful when working with horses. The idea that paying attention to the sensations and then supporting a client to allow that knowing to translate into the imaginal level , that of ideas, metaphor, resonances, is foundational to my

approach. To keep a client in the immediate experience, to allow resonances and the message in emotions to surface, is what drives many of my choices as a facilitator when working with horses. I will return to this understanding of experiential learning and a deeper look at Kolb in the context of the wider knowledge landscape

## ADULT LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

As mentioned above, much of my perspective on adult development comes from the humanistic tradition as expressed by Ian Cunningham (Cunningham, et al., 2000). In practice this translates into attention paid to the whole person, not just what content or skills might this leader need to develop, but also who they are when they are using that knowledge or skill. Comfort with the deeper psychological processes both intra and interpersonally are part and parcel of facilitating from this perspective. This fits with the philosophical position on leadership development of Roffey Park; namely that leadership is an inside job. Leadership of self before leadership of others is a core thread that runs throughout many of our client engagements. There are also the emerging ideas around vertical development (Petrie, 2003) which sees learning as part of an on-going maturation process, and an increasing complexity of mind necessary for leaders to deal successfully with ambiguity and complexity This sits alongside the belief that any kind of leadership development is also an OD (Organisation Development) intervention too.

## EQUINE ASSISTED LEARNING / LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The final area I would like to cover in my knowledge landscape is how I came to understand EALD as a method.

My Equine Assisted learning education came initially through levels one and two of EAGALA's (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association) model (Notgrass & Pettinelli, 2015) and through Horse Dreams (Gorsler, 2011). However, what I found was that with EAGALA, it was predominantly aimed at therapeutic or social work practitioners. The methods, as mentioned in my introduction were what one might call 'facilitation by numbers'. Whilst the principles are superficially sound, i.e. based on Kolb's experiential learning cycle; the practical realities of trying to teach 40+ people meant the first level left me feeling totally at sea and unprepared for working with groups.

The second level, whilst more effective in terms of numbers of participants (only 18 that time), left me unsure about the application to a leadership development context. The first issue for me was that the model assumes that you need to have a horse specialist and a human specialist working in tandem. To assume that the skillset cannot co-exist in the same person was unwieldy at best, and meant you had the two facilitators whispering to each other trying to decide how best to make sense and intervene. This seemed to create an unhelpful power dynamic, and left me feeling in the dark.

The second big issue was more about how the training was itself facilitated. The horses had been displaying highly competitive behaviours for three days, and it was obvious that the facilitators were not getting on (two local facilitators and one from head office in the US). However, when this was gently inquired into, it was denied. I personally found it hard to work with a method that its proponents were not prepared to stand by.

The EAHAE (European Association of Horse Assisted Educators) training was more corporately based, and focused more on the activities and exercises. However, they were explicit when they said they would not teach the basics i.e. observation, feedback and general facilitation skills. This was more useful in generating confidence that the skills I already had were applicable, but it still took me awhile to find my own way of working. Some of the exercises I found to be useful and have since

adapted. Some I would not consider using on physical safety grounds. Others I would not consider using on the grounds that I did not agree with the impact they potentially had on the horses. It was the encouragement on this programme from both the tutor and other participants which actually gave me the confidence to experiment and find my own way to work.

## POPULAR AUTHORS IN THE EQUINE ASSISTED LEARNING DOMAIN

### Linda Kohanov

Linda Kohanov has written several books including The Tao of Equus, Riding Between the Worlds (2003) and The Power of the Herd (2013). It is this last one that I will focus on as it is specifically aimed at leadership. Kohanov takes a social and historical look at power and the positive and negative uses of it. In particular she focuses on what may be seen as myths of power such as the idea of the survival of the fittest as promoting individualistic, competitive behaviours, being wrong from an evolutionary perspective. Instead, non-predatory power and collaboration or relationship having far greater survival benefits.

She also spends time looking at some historically significant leaders such as George Washington or Winston Churchill and makes claims about their leadership abilities being , in part, due to their renowned horsemanship skills. There is a potential flaw in the logic here, as horses were the main form of transport for the ruling classes, so just because a significant leader happened to have good horsemanship skills does not really tell you very much. There may have been equally good horsemen who did not become leaders and vice versa. It is also a little bit like saying that horses can teach us about adapting to a complex, emergent systems because they have survived for millennia. Well, so as every other species that is still alive today. There is also a worrying emphasis on a form of leadership which is that of a 'great man' ( or woman to give her her due). These 'great men' display particular qualities and the implication is that if we too display these qualities then we will be great leaders. These points, whilst made, are not wholly central to the arguments being espoused. So, while I may question some of the logic and veracity of the claims, they do not materially detract from the text.

However, she does make some interesting points about what we might be able to learn about non-predatory power, from how horse herds organise themselves. These range from conserving energy for true emergencies, skilful use of power and assertiveness not dominance, to consensual leadership where whoever is most able in that moment to take on the role of leadership does so, regardless of title or formal position. Many of the (12) principles appear sound, and deriving from what seems to be a heartfelt desire for organisations and society to be organised in a less damaging, more sustainable way. However, the power and the legacy that I believe this book has created is that many so called EALD practitioner have mythologised horses and horse herd dynamics as the eutopia of leadership. This is not the fault of the book, but more likely to be insufficient or underused critical thinking skills. What Kohanov has tried to do is put forward a sophisticated argument for a non-predatory approach to the use of power in organisations. However, what I often hear is a somewhat less sophisticated mantra that 'horses are our teachers'. If you have ever witnessed a horsey 'squabble' or seen an elderly horse ostracised from a herd for being too weak to keep up, you will think twice about uncritically holding horse herds up as a new model for leadership.

### Barbara Rector

Barbara's main book is called 'Adventures in Awareness' (AIA) (Rector, 2005) and is rooted in her history of working in mental health. It is no surprise then that the approach is focused on personal discovery and empowerment.

In her purpose statement, Rector says that AIA is there to "…develop awareness and expand consciousness while enhancing and individual's self-confidence through work with horses." p xiii. She further expands on this by stating that: "The intention of AIA is to develop personal reflective skills grounded in self-responsibility, while expanding awareness to become more fully conscious of internal thoughts that contribute to one's experience of reality. Expanded consciousness is associated with developing empowerment. Authentically empowered individuals make healthy behaviour choices, living comfortably in peace and support of one another and the planet." pxvi

This short description of purpose and intent is illustrative of a particular perspective on the work with horses. For me this appears to be coming from a state of development, a level of maturity that is perhaps not that common. In Susan Cook-Greuter's taxonomy (2013) I would hazard a guess that Barbara is operating from a level of autonomous or strategist. Strategists can, "…consciously commit to create a meaningful life for themselves and for others in the world through self-determination and self-actualization." p64 Also "Wanting to help others evolve is one of the strongest motivators for Autonomous persons" p65.

I had the privilege to meet Barbara and my experience of her was of not simply an extremely knowledgeable practitioner, but a kind, humble and wise person. The language that she uses throughout the book illustrates this humanistic, and at times transpersonal perspective. She talks of insights not just learning, of energetic flows and of entering the 'Tao', of exploring a personal relationship with a power greater than one's self. She was also one of the first writers that I came across who talked about 'trusting the process' which means that if you watch what the horses are doing and trust that they will be giving you an accurate picture of what is happening for the person.

There is also much that has its roots in a therapeutic approach. For example there is an emphasis on archetypes, or on feeling feelings fully and on attending to beliefs and inner processes. I am a firm believer that just because something happens to have a therapeutic effect, does not mean it has to be therapy. What I would say though is that paradigm of 'healing' or returning to wholeness does create a particular way of looking at working with horses. For me the implication is that some practitioners can come at this work with leaders as if they are somehow broken and need fixing. I am well aware that is not the intent, but there is still a tendency for some practitioners, whether influenced by Barbara's work, or simply because they themselves have a background in therapy, to treat the work of EALD in a quasi-therapeutic way.

# WIDER KNOWLEDGE LANDSCAPE

## OVERVIEW

My knowledge landscape as outlined above, is essentially the knowledge base with which I entered into this research. As noted above, this was largely practice and practitioner based and as such had little that was subject to peer review or connection with current academic thinking. This section places that personal knowledge into a wider context. This is both to broaden the understanding of what relates to this field and to acknowledge different or even contradictory perspectives.

In this section I will outline in more depth some of the practitioner based approaches to facilitation and add in more contemporary and academic literature. I will also look at experiential learning and how that has evolved, with reference to related fields such as outdoor or adventure education and reflective practice as a process of learning from individual experience. I will then locate this within the literature around adult learning and leadership development. At each stage I will reflect on my understanding of what each of these perspectives may contribute to the practice of EALD.

There is a small amount of literature available at the moment about the area of Equine Assisted Learning, but as yet very little if anything has been written directly about the facilitator or their role in the process, or indeed how this fits into the more specific context of Equine Assisted Leadership Development. It mainly covers it's efficacy as a method, rather than an inquiry into how it is conducted. An over view of what literature there is will be included at the end of this review.

## FACILITATION

As mentioned above, the IAF has an extensive handbook with articles covering all six areas of facilitator competency (Schuman, 2005). Literature of this nature from a professional association, often draws together a comprehensive view of how the topic is being thought about currently by respected practitioners. So there is an element of peer review, albeit, with a fairly narrow focus. However, what I will reiterate is that much of this literature is in the context of facilitators working within a corporate context, often with intact teams. The focus is often on the facilitator being a neutral party who is able to variously support the group problem solving or decisions making, improve collaborative working and support insight being gained in to the human processes underpinning any tasks being performed. Whilst this may be part of what a leadership developer does at times, the facilitation of learning as opposed to teaching, is a different application of a similar skill set.

### ROGER SCHWARZ

One of those skill sets that is particularly relevant in EALD because of the emerging and almost content free nature of the experience is that described by Roger Schwarz (Schwarz, 2005). What Schwarz encapsulates are ways to describe what sits at the heart of skilled facilitation. This is a combination of knowledge, skill, values, awareness and internal resources which enables the practice of a facilitator to be flexible and responsive, but also securely grounded. Schwarz captures something that I have seen in a number of different facilitation scenarios, but particularly when experiencing EALD programmes run by inexperienced facilitators. He states "Often facilitation approaches represent a compilation of techniques and methods without an underlying theoretical framework" (p.23). The tools may be the same, however the underlying framework is what supports skilled and appropriately flexible application.

### OBSERVATION AS INTERVENTION

One tool that is particularly relevant to experiential learning, and EALD in particular is an approach to offering observation as intervention. Schwarz is credited (amongst others) with the idea of a ladder of inference which helps facilitators to recognise that there is data that they choose from a pool of possible things to observe. They then offer that observation as a first step in what he calls the diagnosis intervention cycle. If needs be, they may offer an inference in terms of what tentative meaning are they (the facilitator) making from that data. He is keen to make sure that facilitators don't go any further up that ladder, so not moving from inference to interpretation or judgement. As a basic facilitation skill, observation and offering that observation as an intervention to raise awareness and to create some sort of shift in the client, is fundamental.

He talks of observing and inferring and then deciding to disclose first observations then low-level inferences, checking out alternative perspectives as he goes. The discipline of having real clarity about what our own inferences are and declaring them as such, with an invitation to look at different perspectives, is a fascinating one. The degree of self-awareness needed for this is high. To have the required level of reflective and reflexive practice is not an easy task. Each time there are new people, new organisations, there are a new set of assumptions, of norms and values that can be inquired into. Each one may challenge deeply held perspectives on the world which may never have

been thought about before. This speaks to me of the on-going development of facilitators in terms of the perspective they can take on themselves and ideally, the need for regular supervision.

### Facilitator values and principles

What Schwarz's approach is useful for is to set out clearly some key principles. For example he talks about having explicit core values. These can be used in a number of different ways; helping clients to understand what kind of facilitator you are, self-analysis, or as guiding principles when designing new methods on the fly. His seem to be based more from the perspective of facilitator as neutral third party support to help a group solve problems, rather than a learning or behaviour change perspective, but they can be extrapolated. For example, free and informed choice might be about raising someone's self-awareness to the extent that they can make choices about what behaviours would serve them best in the future. It would also be important for it to be clear what the contract was with the commissioning client, so that there were no hidden agendas built into the learning programme. This can compromise the neutrality that is a strong thread which runs through Schwarz's writing on this topic. He is also particularly strong when it comes to building both a contract with the commissioning client and with the group to create a safe space for exploration. However, his approach is to use a 'ready-made' contract, that whilst well-formed and broad is set from his experience not co-constructed.

### Power

One final point from Schwarz's approach is the idea of exploring and changing the way we think. This need to be willing, able and committed to exploring and changing the way we think as facilitators is even more important in an equine environment than an organisational or leadership context. The dynamics of facilitator and group power will be explored more fully, but it is particularly relevant when the majority of the group are likely to have far less experience of horses than the facilitator. So, not only do you have the normal dynamic when facilitating a leadership programme when the temptation may be for the group to look to the facilitator as the 'expert', you may well be the horse expert too!

I don't totally agree with how Schwarz characterises the different thinking modes (unilateral control and mutual learning model see p30) as I think this goes well beyond just thinking of ourselves as right or blameless and others misinformed or wrong. This is more about a vigilance for when the group may draw in the facilitator to show them 'how it is done' or ask for an interpretation of a horse's behaviour. This also comes back to being clear about the role of the facilitator and what role you are playing at any given moment, consciously or unconsciously.

### Heron and Expert power

Heron also looks at power and indeed the politics of knowledge as a facilitator. The need to pay attention to what power you have, how that is used and what power is attributed to you, is important. Heron does talk about the power inherent in the choice of using whatever style is most appropriate, at any given time. The important point for me is his, rather mind stretching, way of looking at the politics of who makes the decision about what style is chosen.

His three sources of power are tutelary, political and charismatic, and he also has four levels of authority.

**Tutelary power**

Tutelary is essentially expert power in that it assumes that as a facilitator you do have some level of knowledge in the subject and in the ability to transfer that knowledge to others. This short cuts the process of learning everything from scratch, through direct encounter each time. In the EALD

environment, this may also include a level of expertise with horses, which whilst not about being able to teach people horsemanship skills, does seem to contribute to a felt sense of safety in participants.

**Charismatic power**

The charismatic power is the most interesting in that it comes from someone who is 'flourishing from their own inner resources.' (Ibid p20). The assumption is that if I, as a facilitator, am self-aware, self-directed and self-reflective enough, then I will be able to empower others to be the same. Heron talks about those who are not at this level, are likely to be exercising undue control or influence in the process because of repressed anger or fear. For me, this is why supervision in any kind of facilitation work is essential as, if this is largely unconscious, how would a practitioner become aware of this? In my experience, I see this in subtle ways; through the unintentional privileging of the facilitator's voice, or most often their interpretations.

**Power and identity**

There are other takes on power in the facilitator-learner dynamic. For example Iszatts-White et.al (2017, p. 583) says: "Current thinking on reflexive pedagogy has sought to recast the tutors' power away from that of an instructor delivering expertise, to educator-as-facilitator in which power shifts in the relationship towards the students." .They go on to talk about a sense of 'identity undoing' which moves the facilitator's sense of self from one bound up with knowledge and mastery and shifts it to co-inquirer. They link an 'emancipatory agenda' with the practice of reflexivity and link power and identity. The practice of looking at one's beliefs and assumptions in a leadership development context, begins to dislodge old frames of reference and personal constructs for learners. This can lead to a greater sense of awareness, a clearer identity and the ability to access a greater sense of personal power.

**Power and reflexivity**

What is interesting for me is that this is in the context of leadership development, but still conducted by academics on an accredited programme. The authors seem to be saying that if they have that emancipatory agenda for their students, they are still creating that agenda and exercising power. "…facilitators are generally analysed as hierarchical figures with the institutional and pedagogical power to inflict, invite, sanction and moderate identity undoing." (p558). However, if they too are willing to join in the reflexivity and weather the potential shift in identity, the power balance equalises somewhat. They make a lovely distinction between power over and power to as 'sage on the stage' vs 'guide on the side' (p591). I am somewhat surprised that this appears to be a revelation for the authors. This may be where learning philosophy and facilitator identity intersect.

**Politics of Education**

There is still an emphasis in some management and leadership education on the transmission of knowledge and perhaps a sense of 'doing to' participants on a programme to reach set outcomes. This to me would be considered training, not facilitated learning. This may be academically based, but not exclusively so. However, variations on a theme of self-managed learning, treating participants as equals and active in their own development is becoming more common. What the authors conclude is that facilitators need to be willing to inquire into and perhaps let go of some their own sources of power and identity in order work effectively with leaders who are also critically reflecting.

Another perspective on this draws on the work of Paulo Freire and his popular education programme methods. (Glowacki-Dudka, et al., 2017). This is essentially a description of one method where the pedagogical assumptions are explicitly mindful of power. They conclude that different expectations and intentions for attending a workshop based on these principles need to be taken

into account to ensure effective power dynamics. They also describe several methods that can be utilised to maintain power equality, build community, support participants to critically reflect and to allow other members to process learning in their own way and time.

There seems to be a real art in knowing the difference between using self as instrument to support the learning and using own intuitions and interpretations which then make the experience more about the facilitator than the participant. Trevor Bentley (Bentley, 2000)) talks about only being more down the persuasive or directive end of his continuum if it does not disempower. The subtle ways that interpretations and unowned inferences can disempower learners in any environment, but particularly whilst working with horses, is something to watch out for. Again, the level of self-knowledge and personal development required not to fall into that trap is considerable.

### Gestalt approaches to facilitation

I will take this opportunity to briefly outline a different perspective on facilitation from Trevor Bentley. This will be supplemented by other practitioners from a similar perspective such as Chidiac (2008) and Wright (2012). The gestalt school of therapy was founded by Fritz Pearls (Perls, et al., 1994) and some of its approaches have been translated into working with groups in a developmental context.

### In service of the group

Trevor Bentley's (2000) (2013) approach to facilitation is founded in Gestalt Therapeutic principles. Bentley talks about the facilitator being there to support empowerment and opportunities for learning, again placing this approach in a humanistic tradition. Bentley uses a continuum to describe the ways in which a facilitator can intervene, ranging from directive through persuasive to supportive. This has similarities with Heron's modes of intervention in that it is designed with the assumption that a facilitator can select from the range depending on the needs of the group, not their own needs or preferences.

His focus is on sensing and responding to what the group needs with the intention of moving more towards the gentle or supportive end of his continuum as and when the group is ready for that. However, where Bentley is more accessible than Heron, that does not mean to say that he is any less expert in his approach. Because of his Gestalt underpinnings, it has always struck me as a less cognitive approach to choosing if and how to intervene. There is more emphasis on working with what emerges and being able to handle whatever emerges from whatever interventions are made or not made. His also seems to be more mindful of risk and the possibility of shame in groups, perhaps with a therapeutic or psychodynamic leaning. It may just be his style of writing, but I often found myself warming to the immediacy and humanity of his approach.

### Being in the moment

I have had some training in gestalt approaches to facilitation as it is one of the core methodologies we use at Roffey Park. The learning cycle we use is Gestalt inspired in that it always begins with awareness, of both self and other, as well as moving through an exploration of choices and experimentation (Partridge, 2013). We also work with what we refer to as 'here and now' learning which encourages a group to respond from what is happening for them in the moment, not referring back to what was or what will be.

Where Gestalt approaches add something to facilitation, particularly of an experiential nature, is the emphasis on 'contact' (Bentley, 2002). I take that to mean the awareness within oneself of experiences, sensations and needs and making contact with the world outside that self to have those needs satisfied. In Gestalt approaches, paying attention to the physical as the ground of awareness is particularly helpful. This supports a deeper sense of self-awareness as it is not purely intellectual or a 'knowing about', but a direct contact with the knowing as it is experienced in that moment. This is another aspect, that of being present to the here and now, that is helpful when

working with experiential learning, but horses in particular. They are fully present and lapses in concentration and in the moment awareness on the part of humans can create unintended consequences.

Wright (Op.Cit) describes the power of physical experimentation in a Gestalt oriented coaching session: "A limitation of traditional conversation-based coaching is that a client's mind may unconsciously filter or suppresses knowledge that he or she considers unacceptable or unbearable….Physically acting out can raise hidden, repressed, tacit or subconscious knowledge into conscious awareness. The body bypasses psychological filters and defences and ''speaks'' in the here-and-now…." (p68)

From a facilitation of learning perspective, gestalt has an emphasis on personal growth and self-discovery. By more deeply understanding the self as it is now, rather than imposing change, a learner can discover moments of choice. With the support and challenge of a facilitator, fellow learners or a coach, they can experiment with different ways of being and doing. (Chidiac, 2008)

Other concepts I use regularly in my practice are such things as contact, or the depth and openness of the connection with myself and others; foreground and background or figure and ground – what has a group's attention or my attention and what does not; the idea of a gestalt as the whole being greater than the sum of its parts e.g. an emergent property of a collection of individuals coming together. See (Houston, 2007). The last concept that has common currency at Roffey Park is that of 'Self-as-Instrument'. Bentley mentions this in his 2013 book, but various other writers have used this phrase in the context of L&D and OD, most notably, Mee-Yan Cheung Judge as she says "The concepts of instrumentality in effective OD practice and presence in gestalt practice see the use of self as our prime asset in achieving the helping relationship." (2012, p. 44)

### GESTALT APPROACHES TO WORKING WITH HORSES

All of these aspects of a Gestalt approach to facilitation are relevant for working with horses. As has been mentioned before, horses are always and only in the present moment. They are aware of their own sensations, but attuned to the energetic and emotional state of others and aware of their environment. To be able support clients to learn and benefit from the presence of a horse as opposed to any other experiential method, I have to be fully present too. I have to be fully present to the whole as well as the sum of its parts and to be able to work with what emerges. Gestalt ideas are useful, but it is the practice of that awareness as contact that really makes the difference. However, it adds another layer of complexity to be able to use my skill and experience in the moment, within the unpredictable context that is Equine Assisted Leadership Development.

## THE INTUITIVE FACILITATOR

Part of being in the moment and with the felt sense as the ground from which to work, flashes of insight or intuition come into the facilitator's awareness. The more I speak with experienced facilitators, the more I am getting curious about the role of this felt sense of knowing or intuition. Given what Heron says about the experiential and the imaginal being non-linguistic or at least very hard to verbalise, it does not surprise me that many facilitators will say 'I don't know why I intervened then, I was relying on my intuition.' However, I am wary of inexperienced facilitators who may use the same explanation.

Epstein (2010) gives a brief definition which seems to cover the experience, but does not really illuminate the concept: "Intuition involves a sense of knowing without knowing how one knows." (p296) Epstein also talks about two different information processing systems, which parallels to a degree, Heron's ways of knowing. He suggests that one that is automatic and associative and designed to maximise our positive affect and the other is rational and verbal. The way it is described, it would seem that intuition is little more than gut feel on what has given us pleasure, or avoided

pain, in the past. This does not accord with my own experience, which whilst possibly associative, has a much greater degree of insight.

The quality of insight is something that seems key to me as a practitioner. Pretz (2014) talks about there being at least three different types of intuition and all of them seem to have a relevance when facilitating learning, particularly with horses. The first is holistic intuition which is derived from different sources of data and integrated in a gestalt. This seems to take into account the complexity of the situation and gives a way of thinking about what is paid attention to; what is foreground or background, figure or ground. "Holistic intuitions are judgements based on qualitatively non-analytical process, decisions made by integrating multiple diverse cues into a whole that may or may not be explicit in nature." (p454).

The second is inferential intuition which would seem to be based on previous analytical processes having become automatic. This one is fascinating, especially given the samples Pretz et al. are using to test their scale of intuitions are undergraduates, or at best graduate Occupational Therapy students with limited clinical experience. The authors do acknowledge this, but this highlights a really important point for me: How experienced do you need to be to be considered experienced?

"***Once expertise has been established***, inferential intuitions may be considered highly reliable." (p454 emphasis added)

I have been facilitating groups and coaching individuals for the best part of 20 years, with a rough estimate of 15,000 hours' experience. At what point did I start relying on my intuition as usefully accurate? Even now I only ever offer my intuitions as tentative. For myself, if I become certain of the accuracy of intuition that is probably a good indication to tread carefully and notice if something else is at play, such as an unconscious bias, script or judgement. For those with considerably less experience, the question for me is whether their 'intuitions' can be as useful, reliable or accurate?

The final one is affective intuition, essentially having a feeling about a situation, good or bad. Whilst I concur that emotions are a very useful source of data I would contend that the amount of emotional intelligence required to discern between what is actually about the situation in front of you and your own biases and projections is considerable. And unfortunately in my experience, not that common. Pretz et al. do suggest that affective intuition can be valid and insightful, ***if*** it is used in combination with both inferential and holistic intuitions.

In Sadler -Smith's (2016) paper on the subjective experience of the intuitor, he distinguishes between the process of intuiting, the intuitions themselves in which bodily or somatic awareness was a key feature, and the outcomes of the intuitions which may be decisions to act or not. So rather than talking about different types of intuition, he seems to be delineating steps. His working definition of what intuition stands at:

"*positively- or negatively-valenced affective states, manifesting cognitively or somatically, arising automatically, rapidly and subconsciously, informed by prior learning and experiences, affording subjective evaluations and guiding subsequent behaviours"* (p1080, italics in original).

I'm particularly taken by how intuitions are seen to come into awareness; both somatically and cognitively. The resonances for me with Heron's ways of knowing are notable. In the experiential learning section below I will explore further. Briefly here, the first way of knowing is the direct acquaintance with a felt sense of an experience, essentially affective in nature. This to me seems rather similar to what is being termed bodily awareness in Sadler-Smith. And the imaginal is the second way of knowing which seems to correspond to the cognitive awareness as described (p1077). Perhaps this is evidence for Heron's ideas or just a way of saying that there are some ways of knowing that may be more correctly labelled as intuitive. The implications for both the practice of facilitation and the nature of experiential learning may be interesting to say the least.

### Reliability in intuition

To summarise, my biggest concern is that intuition may be used by those who have little in depth experience of facilitation to justify poor quality decisions and interventions. And yet, it seems it does have an extremely valuable and valid place in the experienced facilitator's toolkit. Perhaps it is not just the purview of 'experts' as warned about by Marta Sinclair (Sinclair, 2010), and that novices can be creatively intuitive precisely because they are not experts. I do want to emphasize the difference, as mentioned in Sinclair, that you can be experienced without being an expert. I will be intrigued to find out from my experienced facilitators whether they do use intuitive judgements and insights. If they do, what is it that allows them to be critically reflective or at least discerning to guard against hubris, or even well intentioned projections?

## LEARNING

In this section I want to explore my understanding of the related areas of experiential learning, adult development and different approaches to leadership development. These related areas provide the context within which EALD facilitation sits, and as such need to be understood insofar as the perspective taken on learning will have an influence on how one sees the role of a facilitator.

### Experiential learning

#### Heron's approach to the experiential learning cycle

The practice of facilitation is one aspect of understanding how to work with groups, especially as Heron (Heron, 1999) does talk a great deal about experiential learning. However, for him, it would appear that he is looking at whatever it is that someone experiences, that direct acquaintance, as experiential

My understanding of Heron's experiential learning cycle is that there are primary and secondary cycles and that there are different ways of working with this either from the facilitator's or the learner's perspective. As he talks about initially the ground of experiential learning is the affective or felt experience, the 'direct acquaintance'. For any kind of in-depth learning to occur, there has to be some kind of emotional arousal and some form of appreciation of the felt sensations that accompany those emotions. From there, the individuating perceptions and images combined with the participatory intuitions and resonances continue the learning cycle. The third stage is the reflection (participatory) and discrimination (individuating), in my understanding, the sense making on the conceptual or cognitive level. 'How does this fit with a model or theory I'm aware of', or 'what kind of model or theory might be deduced from this experience?' The final aspect is that of intention and action i.e. given all of that,' what do I want to achieve?' and 'how might I execute with the skill that I have?'

Heron talks about this as the primary cycle that can and often does happen autonomously within each learner to a greater or lesser extent. However, this is making a big assumption that they are reasonably mature as learners and not just cycling through an intellectual knowledge acquisition and regurgitation loop. Whilst not that common anymore, I do occasionally come across participants who just want to be told the 'right' answer. There is a more common reluctance to work on a felt and/or emotional level. There can be a strong defensive element to this kind of learning, i.e. usually self-esteem being heavily bound up with intellectual success. The level of sophistication required to do this kind of action inquiry is quite advanced. The levels of self-awareness and the ability to notice one's own process in the moment and do something with it, are not insignificant. So how does this apply in the EALD context?

We spend anywhere between 15mins and a whole day helping participants tune in to the felt sense, prior to working with horses. This can be as simple as awareness of breath and physical positioning, to in depth work with somatic coaching and centring practices. The emotional element of this particular stage of learning is also brought to the fore as anxiety is a common experience. We take

the time to encourage participants to tune into, notice, own and accept however they are feeling as they are feeling it. This keeps participants in the present moment, and also more able to tune in to what is happening around them. The question, then for me is, to what extent can the facilitator support the other elements of this learning cycle? Indeed, does it actually work the way Heron reports?

I would go so far as to say that the ability to combine both the individuating and participatory elements of the learning cycle is challenging for a facilitator, let alone a participant. Yet again Heron is thorough but at the risk of being inaccessible. I am wondering if the facilitator's role is actually to support those elements as they are happening in the moment. This can at times feel that my role is to scaffold the awareness of the learner with my awareness of both the felt and the imagined or intuitive. This is often accomplished with simple, subtle noticing, of paying attention to what is and what is implied in the interaction between learner and horse. If part of experiential learning is intuitive and an aspect of intuition is that it is informed by prior learning and experiences (see Sadler-Smith definition of intuition above), what are the implications for those who have not experienced experiential learning before? There is also much talk of somatic markers (Bechara, 2005) and the propensity of people to pay attention to their 'gut feel', particularly when there is risk or uncertainty involved, but not everybody does pay attention to their somatic experiences. You only have to ask a bunch of managers about how they felt an exercise went for them and the normal response is 'fine'; getting further description than that, either somatic or emotional can be a struggle!

### Other ways to characterise experiential learning

In modern learning and development, this is more commonly understood as a specific exercise or method, which simulates some aspect of what it is that is being studied. This could be characterised by a simple 'learning by doing' that may range from a problem solving task to highlight team behaviours or role playing difficult conversations. However, it could also include activities that have their origins in the human relations movement of the 40's and 50's such as T-groups (Seaman, et al., 2017) or action learning sets as devised by Reg Revans (Revans, 2011) (Antell & Heywood, 2015). Interestingly Seaman et al quote Fenwick as saying: "…. assumptions rooted in a particular training tradition became separated from their origins in practice to establish the generic definition of experiential learning as "an independent learner, cognitively reflecting on concrete experience to construct new understandings, perhaps with the assistance of an educator, toward some social goal of progress or improvement" (Fenwick, 2001, p. 7)." This is most likely where Kolb's individual focus in terms of his experiential learning cycle comes.

### Kolb

You cannot really look at experiential learning without taking a close look at Kolb and his learning cycle in its numerous iterations and expositions (Baker, 2005) (Kolb, 2009) (Kolb, 1984). There are critics of this model cited in Kayes, (Kayes, 2002) who level criticisms such as being too cognitive or too individualistic or that the model is potentially more of a hierarchy rather than a cycle (Heron, 1999). Even though Kolb has largely been discredited (Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015), it is still commonly referred to, even in relatively sophisticated learning environments.

I do think it has been misunderstood or perhaps oversimplified in popular understanding of the model. It has been useful in bringing into the management education lexicon the ideas of reflection and connecting theory and practice. Though there does seem to be an emphasis on the cognitive processing of all of the elements. What is not clear is whether that is just because western society has a preoccupation with 'being in the head' rather than integrating multiple sources of information or whether that is indeed Kolb's intent. Essentially Kolb talks about 2 dialectical process of *taking things in* by Apprehending (concrete experience) and Comprehending (Abstract conceptualisation) and *transforming* that information into knowledge through a process of Intention (reflective observation) and Extension (active experimentation).

Vince (Vince, 1998) is probably the most comprehensive critique of Kolb, though even he does not actually come up with an alternative. The points he and others (Kayes,) make are essentially:

- **Too cognitive:** Focuses on 'analytical detachment' and assumes that reflection is easy and simple. Kegan (Kegan, 1994) as cited in Kayes (p142) makes the useful point that really expecting managers to have a sufficiently well-developed critical faculty needed for the depth of reflection required is not only unrealistic but potentially harmful. There is also a big difference between reflections, which is essentially thinking about something, using the same mental models as always, vs critical reflection. This level of criticality is challenging because many managers are not used to questioning their own assumptions and because of the next criticism.

- **No account of emotional defence mechanisms**: Not everyone is open to learning, especially if that learning may cause them to question some deeply held beliefs, their sense of identity or some other fundamental aspect of how they see the world and themselves in that world. Another side criticism of Kolb is that it is after the fact reflection, and given how good most people are at maintaining a sense of self-esteem, we can easily delude ourselves. We may only have partial memories, blind-spots and resistance to see difficult things about ourselves. As facilitators, we need to be mindful of what is being challenged when genuine contact is made. Most leaders are not used to accessing their own felt sense and so the role of the facilitator in supporting feeling, meaning, valuing and confronting has to be played sensitively. The facilitator needs to be skilled at recognising and working with projections, transference, denials, suppressions, fears and disintegrations. Especially when delving into felt sensations, all manner of forgotten, suppressed or ignored experiences may rise to the surface unbidden.

  Vince makes an interesting point about learners being able to hold anxiety and discomfort long enough to keep a space open for insight to emerge. He also says that learning may occur later as insights aren't always immediately understood. There is a sense where disintegration needs to be tolerated long enough for new information to be incorporated- this could be simple or profound. The role of the facilitator is to hold a safe enough space, long enough, to help value the humanity and vulnerability and to confront unseen defences with compassion. Facilitators need to be able to work with a range of emotions in themselves as well as in others, especially if the facilitator power dynamic is not to be re-enforced. Vince makes the point that if all the facilitator does is ask how the participant felt, then it is implying that they are not part of the learning field. Perhaps a better question is 'what are you noticing?' (In self, in others) as this can be followed up with what the facilitator is noticing, using their own felt sense, physical impressions and inferences.

- **Direct experience not always the best way to learn:** on a really practical note, whilst learning from our own direct experience is liberating, there are some things that it would be unethical to learn directly from, such as sexual harassment or bullying. That is why role plays, simulations and analogous scenarios are useful learning tools. The practice of using horses is one of these analogous scenarios. It is used for stripping back the social constraints and giving leaders direct experience of how their energy and presence (or lack of it) is responded to by another sensitive, sentient being.

- **Reflection on action rather than reflection in action:** As mentioned above the here and now, the felt experience is not paid much attention until after the event. The role of feedback in the moment is largely ignored by Kolb, and in my experience, is useful in developing this capability. There is something deeper than this as well in terms of access to 'knowing'. Knowing is '…an activity of consciousness' (Hart, 2000). This often fleeting,

momentary experience is available to all as a source of insight, but may be challenging for many to recognise, or accept as a valid source of learning. This practice of reflection in action, of momentary insight is particularly useful and will be covered in more detail in a later section.

- **Too Individualistic:** The model seems to ignore social aspects of learning or language. The idea of the individual learner is a myth really. None of us exist in isolation, we are products of our past and existing relationships, or our culture and society. Nor does the model take into account the power issues that are often present in management education contexts. These can be status, role, gender, expertise related, amongst others. This may be particularly relevant when working with horses as previously mentioned. The role of expertise as power and safety could have an impact on what information is privileged in that setting.

There are other issues with Kolb that I struggle with. One of which is whilst I understand one of his underpinning principles is about the human capacity for change, I do not necessarily agree with his second premise, that of learning being about problem-solving. That frame seems too limiting and logical for me. Not every development opportunity is a problem to be solved, many leaders come to learn to extend their repertoire rather than coming to 'fix' something.

### Experiential learning and language

But the intriguing point for EAL facilitation is the mediating role of language in experience. Kayes (2002) has offered a slightly different take on how the learning process works in terms of the interplay between personal or tacit knowledge and social or explicit knowledge. His perspective is a post structural Lacanian one, which I am sure I have not grasped all the nuances of. In my understanding, he is equating need with emotion or affective state which has no representation, so purely tacit, until that need is expressed, first to oneself and so beginning to define identity (an ego with a need). "In this way, self-identification represents an ordering process, where needs are given coherence, location and meaning within the larger universe of language." p144. By using language, even to oneself, the individual experience is restricted and defined by the agreed structures of that language. When that experience is then put into the social domain by expressing it to others, it is no longer the sole purview of the individual learner. Whether that representation of self is acknowledged or disregarded, according to Kayes, influences subsequent expressions of self-identity and need. So, the tacit knowledge of the individual is shaped, potentially diminished, by the act of making it explicit.

The more I look at experiential learning, particular around horses, and other ways of knowing, I am less convinced that language is needed much at all. I am not convinced that putting felt experiences into language necessarily clarifies or defines them. They may be convenient anchors or platforms from which to reconnect with the experiential or the imaginal in Heron's language, but simply saying the words does not make much sense. In my experience words can be ways back to what I might call reference or template experiences of such things as power, boundaries, presence, impact, energy etc. that can be called upon in different circumstances. Often though, it is a physical sensation, an image or a felt sense of knowing that supports the re-creation. This is why I will use the phrase 'bank that feeling' with learners as language seems to take us further away from the essence of the experience.

This highlights two things in the practice of EAL facilitation; reinforcing points I've already made about the imperative of offering observations and at best inferences. It is important to take care not to interpret either horse or human behaviour so as not to limit learning by inadvertent judgements. Instead seek to bring to attention aspects of the physical which may be a window on to an internal landscape. Secondly, supporting the attention to the physical and affective without bringing to language too soon. Kayes also makes the point that any language such as English or German, is too

limited when it comes to all the different ways that experience can be represented symbolically. The use of metaphor when working with horses can be powerful as can an understanding of projection and transference as some of the metaphors or symbols may well be subconscious.

Kayes also refers to approaches to management learning that actively seek to make the links between tacit and explicit knowledge more deliberate, by sharing and developing internal vocabulary. All this reminds me of Vygotsky's (Vygotsky, 1986) comment about not being able to enter a world for which you do not have a language. But what if this is your own internal world? This may be looked at from different perspectives. If the lack of a language is because the individual has been divorced from their own affective field then developing this language through conversation and social connection is very useful, if potentially quite scary. Though if this is because the experience is actually transpersonal, going beyond the ego then language may artificially constrain it.

This may relate to assessing, however imperfectly, the development stage of the individual or group with whom the facilitator is working. The approach to facilitation needs to meet each person where they are and not where the facilitator wants them to be. But does that mean feeding the learner a way of representing their internal experience they can use if they have not developed their own yet? Or supporting their reflection if they have not developed the critical faculties to appreciate their assumptions and frames yet? Heron would say that it is fine to provide meaning and feeling hierarchically initially if it supports the development of self-direction ultimately. Does that support or constrain though when it comes to each individual experience? Is the experience in some sense wasted if it cannot be brought into the explicit social domain? Or is it more that meaning will emerge over time when the felt sense is honoured and allowed to 'marinate' within the subconscious? What is the role of the non-expert observer in this experiential learning practice? All questions the findings of this study should illuminate.

### Experiential learning in Outdoor Management Development

In order to get deeper into what is meant by experiential learning, I have started to interrogate the literature on outdoor education and what is referred to as adventure learning. The outdoor and adventure learning movement is one way that experiential learning has been taken out of the classroom, and into a different environment. These environments often include the physical experience and learning set into a group context. Thereby addressing some of the criticisms of the early experiential approaches as being too individualistic and cognitive.

There are a number of different routes into this literature, but one particular approach stood out as a useful cross-over point. Desmond and Jowitt (Desmond & Jowitt, 2012) highlight that, "What seems to be absent in experiential learning is fostering awareness of embodied experience, and one that is inclusive of the environment in which one is participating." P222. With horses, they are themselves embodying the feedback that they are giving, a direct way for the relational other to raise awareness of impact. They go on to say that experiential learning is an internal subjective and phenomenological experience, but also an external experience too. It, "…requires the individual to be aware and connected. Hence, in experiential learning fully immersing oneself (internal), with bodily, emotional and cognitive awareness in the activity (external), creates the greatest potential for learning to happen." p223.

On a side note Magni et al (Magni, 2013) warn of the dangers of too much cognitive absorption and how it can be mitigated by group learning behaviour such as feedback, group reflection etc. This is another potential issue that facilitators need to be aware of when working with individuals with other members of the group observing. For some, simply being in close proximity to a horse can be absorbing and potentially overwhelming, so the balance between immersion and socialising the content of the learning is a delicate one, especially given what has been mentioned about the role of language in learning.

### FEEDBACK AND THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR IN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Desmond and Jowitt (Op.Cit)) discuss the need for peer feedback being set in the context of a genuine dialogue as defined by being data giving and empathic, relational and embodied. As mentioned above, horses only ever give their feedback in an embodied way, so what they lack in vocal language they make up for in the expressiveness of their bodies. The skill and the potential for error is how the facilitator helps learners make sense of those subtle and not so subtle pieces of embodied feedback. The authors talk about trusting different ways of knowing that arise through relationship and reawakening the body. This reminds me of notions of contact as described in Hart et.al (Puhakka, 2000) and of Tolle's Practicing the Power of Now (Tolle, 2002) where he invites readers to take a few moments to experience the 'beingness' of the book they are holding. Contact is something so ordinary and yet it barely registers on most people's conscious awareness.

I particularly liked their description of bodily reactions being signposts within cognition. The authors quote Damasio when they say that "Emotions use 'the body as their theatre'" p226. They go on to say, "Thus the role of the facilitator is to invite somatic awareness and not be wholly invested or attached to it if learners seem to deflect" p226. This echoes what was said earlier about treading carefully if defence mechanisms are triggered. For me, what was most useful was their acknowledgment of how subtle this work can sometimes be and that it is more about exploration and discovery rather than arrival or goal attainment. This brings up ideas of how this work is positioned both for organisations who are sponsoring it and for those participants attending the programme. It is not for everyone as a learner or as a facilitator.

Another aspect that I have wondered about is the role of participant observers in the experience. Whilst there are group activities, there seems to be greater insight when there is a 1:1 relationship. This is partly because as a facilitator there is so much to pay attention to and it is hard to give individual focus; and partly because it is much harder to tell who or what the horse is responding to when there is more than one person in the mix. That does not mean to say that the work is just serial coaching, as the observers are playing a very active role. They are learning about paying attention in themselves and noticing in the other and they are learning by watching.

### LEARNING BY WATCHING OTHERS DO

There is some interesting research into the impact of Vicarious Observational Learning on subsequent direct experiential learning (Hoover, 2012). The research basically says that it gives learners a chance to pick up new skills without having the dual task of trying to perform those skills at the same time. So when they do come to do the 'hands on' part they have already grasped some aspects of the skill. That is not to say though that working with horses is about developing the skills needed to lead a horse. Facilitators need to pay attention to how much those who are watching are rehearsing and trying to get the task 'right' as a defence against vulnerability, loss of face, control or other emotions raised. What this does point to is how important it is to keep the 'tasks' associated with the horses as simple as possible so as not to introduce an element of technique acquisition or cognitive overload.

Heron talks about priming the learning cycle to a degree to increase the affective field (or motivation), but this seems subtly different. The authors talk about conceptual anchoring before observation. This could be potentially useful to the extent that it helps learners to discern different aspects of what they are looking at, but it could be unnecessarily limiting. I sometimes offer loose frameworks (or solid frameworks held loosely?) to give learners a toehold into a different world, but again if it is used to dampen down anxiety too much it may be taken as a spurious 'truth' no matter how lightly it is held. Could any kind of cognitive framework just be keeping people in their heads? A call that each facilitator has to make in each situation depending on the maturity and needs of the group. This particular take on learning is of skill acquisition rather than awareness raising. My personal opinion is that this work is about learning to ***be*** rather than learning to ***do***, but could it be

both? Is learning to do a way into learning to be for those learners who are just starting out on their personal development journeys?

What is interesting, is developing observation as a skill in its own right. My assumption has always been that whenever an individual has worked with a horse, I ask them for their own observations, both of their own state and anything in the horse. Then what the observers noticed and finally adding in what has not been picked up myself. This is based on a desire to co-operatively make meaning, and to ensure that my voice is not privileged above those of the group. However, I have started playing with offering my observations to those watching as the learner is with the horse, so they begin to get a sense of what it is I am paying attention to. Perhaps learning begins with observation as a legitimate means to contain anxiety (except for the person who goes first!), and that awareness raising can actually begin by drawing a group's attention to the subtleties of what both learner and horse are embodying.

### Experiential learning in nature

"Phenomenology is not a search for our reflective cognition of the world, but a search for our original perception of the world" (Morse, 2015).In this article, the author reflects on what it was about a 10-day trip down a river that created profound learning in its participants. Morse refers to the aesthetic experience as being a precursor to any kind of reflective experience. This confused me slightly until I dug into the original meaning of the word, as relating to perceiving with the senses rather than just referring to beauty. Morse (p172) has defined three aspects of what he calls being alive to the present which are:

- *an intimate interaction,*
- *being lost within, and*
- *A 'rightness' in being effortlessly aware.*

The first aspect seems to be characterised by a lack of distraction which enables the participant to fully immerse themselves in the experience. Also that experience is one in which the senses are fully alive and giving a sense of being located in and connected with the beauty of the place. The being lost within as described, seem to have elements which are similar to how both meditative and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002) experiences are often characterised, particularly the element of timelessness and a sense of being connected to something bigger than oneself. It was interesting for me, too that the last element, that of a rightness in being effortlessly aware, is similar to the experience of meditative states.

Anecdotally, working with the horses can have some of the same qualities, particularly the intimate interaction. Participants sometimes express being surprised at how beautiful the horse is, how much of a privilege it feels to be near them and how much of a connection the horse seems to allow. Morse (2015) seems to be saying that there may be a connection with intense and potentially threatening elements such as rapids, actually opening participants up to the more intimate experiences in the quieter sections. This could be an interesting avenue to explore with the EAL work, as there are some very real experiences of fear when working around large animals that seem and can be, unpredictable. Another feature that horses share is that they seem to catch and hold people's attention readily, encouraging that being present in the moment.

The author's main point seems to be that all of the above factors are important in how meaning is made of the experience. That once these experiences have been had, then the heightened awareness and ability to be alive to the present stays with the participant. The embodied, sensory experience is the key; to allow that to be given the time it needs before the cognitive reflective process kicks in is important in the depth of learning. The last few experiences he describes (p179) are reminiscent again of Heron, when he talks about the purpose of learning is to create whole

hearted learners who are self-aware, self-reflective and self-directive. The implications for EALD and the facilitation of these experiences actually comes earlier in a quote from Quay (2013)

> *"*Any reflective experience is always underpinned by an aesthetic experience. Yet we can sometimes overlook the important educational contributions that our programme design and conduct make to aesthetic experience, seeing a programme as merely a logistical compilation of activities, with the educational benefit occurring only via reflective experience*" (p169)*

Here the meaning of aesthetic is important i.e. of the senses. Whereas Morse's example of an extended wilderness river journey is not exactly analogous to working with horses in an arena, there are some important points here for how the learning experience is structured and how meaning is made from that experience. He briefly describes his facilitation style as allowing the experience of participants to unfold over an extended period of time and be unscripted and unbounded. This seems to be particularly relevant if the purpose of such experience is one of self-discovery and developing heightened awareness. Another important point that Morse makes is that he noted that it took four- to five days of this wilderness journey for participants to really let go of old ways of thinking and perceiving their environment. This does have implications for working with horses in that as yet, in my work the experience is often limited to a day at most and often only a few hours.

In my experience of working with organisations on leadership development programmes, there does seem to be a predominant fixation on the cognitive processing of information to make it meaningful and therefore 'useful' in a leadership context, but does it? There is a fundamental point here about what leadership development is actually for. If it is about simply instructing leaders to get better at influencing those around them to achieve results, then the depth of meaning that this study suggests is possible in experiential learning is unnecessary. However, if it is about supporting leaders to be more self-aware, self-directive learners who can take a wider perspective on themselves as part of and separate from their teams, organisations and societies, then this depth of learning and meaning-making is vital. The implications for how these experiences are facilitated is potentially huge. Can you hold the space for another's experience which you yourself may not be able to comprehend?

## ADULT LEARNING AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

As emphasised in the above example, the reflective elements of learning through experience are not simply cognitive processes. There is an aspect of personal connection and meaning making that goes beyond a purely rational process. I am taking reflective practice as a particular element within experiential learning as it is seen as an essential tool in the continued development of a number of professions including teaching, facilitation and social work. Utilising the skills of reflective practice (Mirick, 2015) was seen as critical in supporting experienced social workers to become social work educators. The authors used Schon's reflective framework of knowledge-in-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action.

I am curious about how this may be playing out when working with leaders as an EALD facilitator. This knowing in action seemed to be characterised by Schon as intuitive, 'artful', something cultivated with experience and used spontaneously. What is the knowledge in action that I and others may be drawing on or attending to? There are a few related fields that I draw upon, but that may not be the case for others. I find myself drawing predominantly on my knowledge of facilitation, leadership and horses. Much of this is happening on the experiential and imaginal levels of knowing and perhaps even on the transpersonal.

When discussing the reflection-in-action aspect, Mirick says “When instructors operate from within the reflective practice paradigm, they are attentive, flexible and responsive, and need to ‘dance’ with their students to work out the next steps” p187. Even though these experienced social workers were adept at this reflection-in-action clinically, when in an educator role they reported having too many things to do to attend to this rich source of data. There is a real sense where this could also be true when working with horses. A colleague observed me facilitating an EALD session and commented on how agile one had to be in attending to self, participant, observers, horse and safety issues. And yet with practice it is still possible, if exhausting at times.

Interestingly, this article talks about such skills as listening attentively, using transference and counter-transference, facilitating group process etc. as clinical skills. I would see them as applicable in many situations, but perhaps more so when working with potentially deep issues brought up by the immediacy and intimacy of the horse. They also make an interesting point about these social workers demonstrating the very skills they are talking about in how they go about teaching. This for me is vital; as my ability to reflect in the moment on my own physical state, my awareness of how centred I am, what my experience and intuitions are telling me is a large part of what we are trying to teach. The ability to integrate head, heart and body in whole person awareness is why we work with horses. In my experience, my practice of integration and embodiment has to be the lived in order to do the work with any degree of integrity and authenticity.

The final element, reflection on action, is also worth considering, as there are implications for both facilitator development as well as facilitation practice when helping groups make sense of their experience. This idea of reflection on action does not have to occur removed from the experience, but is often seen as something that happens after an interval of time, perhaps only a few minutes, but even overnight. Again the question is does this have to be done linguistically? Hebert (Hebert, 2015) makes the distinction between Dewey and Schon’s reflective practice models as essentially rational-technicist vs experiential-intuitivist. However, that Schon’s approach by even advancing a theory or model at all is still privileging the cognitive. And yet, that does seem to be the way that practitioners, whether they are facilitators or the leaders they are supporting, process learning. So perhaps going back to the social processes of learning, the reflection after the fact and the sharing of that reflection is still a useful aspect of learning, if not the whole picture.

### NON-COGNITIVE FORMS OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Rigg (2018) provides an up to date introduction of the various discourses in critical reflection. This is no longer considered to be just a cognitive approach to uncovering assumptions, but can also reflect on whole body experience, power and politics of a situation and emotions, collectively and individually. These more sophisticated approaches to critical reflection are in response to a need for leaders and managers to be more adept at dealing with complex, ambiguous problems were purely rational responses no longer suffice. This greater emphasis on the affective and somatic as well as cognitive accords with more modern experiential learning theorists such as Illeris (2004) (2007). As Rigg points out :

“Somatic learning or embodied learning…. is understood to mean a process through which work with the body facilitates information to come into consciousness and be expressed through language (Gendlin, 1992). In other words, bodily tacit awareness becomes knowledge when articulated in words. In this sense of cognition deriving from bodily knowledge, somatic learning encompasses both body and mind.” (p153).

In particular Rigg is making the case for using a Buddhist approach to mindfulness as a way to attend to and use the body as a way into noticing emotions and using them as information. This ability to

pay attention to non-cognitive sources of data is seen as one way of supporting learners to shift their paradigm or perspective from which they make meaning. This is sometimes referred to as vertical development or transformational learning

## TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND MEANING MAKING

Transformational learning is a particular aspect of learning theory that has become more widely known in leadership development circles in recent years. This is so in part because there is more recognition that leaders need to transform the way that they think, not just get new knowledge or skills if they are to have the complexity of mind to deal with the complexity of environment that is the modern workplace.

This way of thinking about learning was first expounded by Jack Mezirow and he and others continue to develop it (Mezirow, 2012; Kitchenham, 2008). It is essentially a process whereby a person thinks about and begins to recognise assumptions, beliefs and habits of mind and engages in dialogue or a reflective discourse with others to come to a richer understanding or more sophisticated meaning structures. So, not dissimilar to what has been mentioned above about the different expressions of meaning making and critical reflection. Interestingly Mezirow draws on Bruner's theory of meaning making when he mentions four elements of meaning making, two of which are maintaining intersubjectivity and relating events to actions taken. When working with horses, both of these ways of meaning making are subtle and to a large extent, non-linguistic. An added element of meaning making is the ability to be become "critically aware of one's own tacit assumptions and expectations…" (Mezirow, 2012, p. 47)

Where this theory may be useful in thinking about how EALD could be considered as transformational is in the potential for assumptions and expectations to be exposed. When working with a horse, assumptions about what it means for me to lead, what influence formal power and status have, and where personal power comes from, can all be highlighted. Leaders are often confronted with their own beliefs, habits of mind and expectations and the impact they have on others in the subtle and not so subtle responses of the horses. The facilitator's role is perhaps to engage in that reflective discourse, to support the formation of new paradigms and ways of construing the world. This, combined with the emphasis on the somatic awareness and reflection on emotions as information, can make this approach to leadership development potentially transformational.

Where transformative learning and leadership development overlap is in what is termed 'Vertical Development'. (Petrie, 2003). Petrie says that:

" Vertical Development refers to advancement in a person's thinking capability. The outcome of vertical stage development is the ability to think in more complex, systemic, strategic, and interdependent ways. It is about how you think….Traditionally, leadership programs have focused mainly on horizontal development. What is it that leaders need to learn, and how do we give them that? At first this sounds sensible. But if your leaders already know what great leaders do and still can't do it, what value is there in telling them again? What if the problem is not what the leader knows, but who the leader is?" (p8)

This builds on the work of Kegan and Lahey (2009) Torbert (2004) and Cook-Greuter (2013) amongst others. This seeks to shift the way a leader sees themselves and the world and themselves in that world. What Petrie seems to miss out is that this is not just cognitive, but emotional and perhaps even spiritual development. Without the connection to the whole self, to include the physical and

emotional, unconscious defence mechanisms could easily scupper any attempts to genuinely develop and grow, not just think differently.

All of this is in order to be better equipped to deal with the ambiguity and complexity of the rapidly changing world of work. June Gunter of Teaching Horse contends that horses are masters at responding in the moment, and dealing with the volatility and complexity of surviving as a species for millennia. What better way to learn how to lead others in the VUCA environment than spending time with those masters? Now, one could argue that any species that has survived to the present day has the ability to respond effectively in a VUCA environment otherwise they would not be here. However, my assumption is that we as humans, have perhaps forgotten our innate abilities to sense and respond to complexity in the way that horses have retained.

In his second paper on the topic, (Petrie, 2015) sets out the conditions for vertical development to occur. The first is what he calls a 'heat' experience, where the situation demands a more expansive way of thinking. This creates discomfort or what Boydell refers to as a 'disorienting dilemma' (2016) (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168) . To an extent, simply being with a horse can create that discomfort. When leaders realise that their old patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving are not having the desired effect on the horse, they have to expand their repertoire significantly. This is rarely just about the cognitive domain; it is often more about the integrated experience of the leader's physical, mental and emotional presence that the horses bring forth. His other two conditions are of being exposed to different perspectives and having the support for integrating the experience into a new perspective, which he calls elevated sense-making.

I am not totally sure that working with horses does give the exposure to other perspectives that Petrie studied, but they certainly provide information, unfiltered by social norms. His study was based in a North American executive education context, which may still have a bias towards the cognitive domain, rather than an embodied one. However, what it does reinforce is that the sense-making element is vitally important. This may be via coaching or peer networks in his world, but in EALD the experience needs to be supported in the first instance by the facilitator. If this powerful approach to leadership development is to be done safely, then it is incumbent on the facilitator to appreciate the depth of this work, and be equipped to hold it effectively.

Part of that holding is to create a reflective space where meaning can emerge. Spence and McDonald (2015) found that if students in an internship programme where encouraged to think and write before (vision statement), during (supervision) and after (reflective assignment), then they were able to discern vertical as well as lateral development. "..reflective activities seem key to eliciting student's cognition and awareness, confidence, self-efficacy, and behavioural capacity, all of which laid a platform to stimulate students' vertical development." (P309)

## SUMMARY OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

There is a lot more to understanding how people learn from their experience than simply using Kolb's rational approach. It seems more like there are many complex and interweaving elements that come in to play depending on what it is an individual can pay attention to at any given moment. For some this may be the subtle nuances of intimately felt experiences, of an embodied sense of knowing. For others it could be the first time they have been awakened to any bodily felt 'sense', and the emotions which emerge from this felt ground may be challenging to appreciate or name. As a facilitator what it is we can pay attention to is perhaps the first consideration. How others defend themselves from the discomfort or uncertainty involved in learning from what is mostly likely to be a fairly novel experience is another. The ability to pay attention to the different aspects of experiential learning, whether they are named as apprehension and comprehension or experiential and

propositional, or knowledge-in-action and reflection-on-action is important. Also to be able to work intuitively in the moment, when language may be wholly inadequate, and yet still maintain a supportive and safe enough place within which to learn.

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Much of the adult learning, vertical development and transformational learning referred to above is either situation in a leadership development context or has strong connection to it. Leadership development is vitally important, but it is also big business. Leadership development seems to be a rich source of investigation, especially when most organisations now spend at least some of their budget on developing those who occupy the role of leader. Yet, there seems to be a dissatisfaction with traditional approaches. A recent Harvard Business Review article (Beer, et al., 2016) even quotes figures such as $356 Billion spent on training in 2015 globally. They talk about the difficulty in using training to actually change behaviours and refers to it as 'the great training robbery'. Their point is that we are still treating organisations as collections of individuals rather than whole systems. Those systems often have a far greater influence over the individuals than the other way around. However, it appears they are making the assumption that training and learning are the same thing.

Leadership development is becoming increasingly focused on the being of the leader, rather than a focus on the skills and capabilities that they need to display (Brendel & Bennett, 2016; Cairns-Lee, 2017). Cairns-Lee also makes the point that development is a particular type of learning, and that it often implies an element of personal growth. This is similar to Illeris and others (Kitchenham, 2008; Illeris, 2014), who talk about the self or identity being that which develops or changes through transformational learning experiences. So it is the growth of both the person as leader and the growth of the practice of leadership within an organisational context.

Wuestewald (2016) discusses the evolution of the pedagogical approaches to Executive Education and makes similar points to Cairns-Lee in that skills and capabilities, whilst still part of leadership development, are by no means the only focus. His perspective is that pedagogies have changed, particularly in the 21st Century, moving from didactic approaches to more experiential, reflective and problem solving based approaches. These now take much more account of prior experience, the self-motivated and self-directed profile of many executive learners as well as the social context of learner. However, what he fails to mention is anything about the somatic and embodied approaches to leadership development that are becoming more prevalent. (Hamill, 2013; Strozzi-Heckler, 2007; Glowacki-Dudka & Griswald, 2016; Knight, 2014; Brendel & Bennett, 2016). These begin to loop back to the ideas of transformational learning as mentioned above.

Mabey (2013) has a comprehensive catalogue of the different approaches to or discourses around leadership development. These range from functionalist approaches which are focused on organisational performance and are characterised by evidence based, structured programmes that make use of competencies, psychometrics etc. that assume the leadership development is programmable and knowable in advance. To Interpretative discourse which is seen as acknowledging "…the more fluid conditions of the knowledge-based economy…. spurred in part by the need for continuous learning in the workplace, requiring informal, embedded and incidental learning strategies…" (p365). Mabey goes on to say that leadership development could be more catalytic and seen as :

"…. creating the space among organizational members to recognize their different constructions of reality, to make them explicit and understandable rather than to try to explain and resolve them in some way (Van der Haar and Hosking 2004). By engaging with emotional, moral and spiritual (rather than simply cognitive) issues, this can be an effective means for surfacing implicit assumptions concerning the activity of leading in an organizational context. The value of this approach is that it helps individual to look critically at the corporately choreographed narratives of leadership in which they and others participate. " (p370)

Leadership development is a broad field with many different approaches, ranging from information transfer through to deeply personally and transformational programmes. EALD, as a predominantly somatic and embodied approach, sits more towards the transformational end of that continuum and most likely within the interpretative discourse. As such, the need to understand what practice looks like in its facilitation is increasingly important and more organisations commission it as part of their leadership development portfolio.

## EQUINE ASSISTED LITERATURE

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, there is relatively little written in the specific area of Equine Assisted Learning in a leadership or organisational context. This is why I have included some masters dissertations in this area. It is still an under researched area, but with an increase in professionalisation of how this work is facilitated, it is my hope that more academic work will be produced.

There have been a few Masters dissertations based around using horses in a coaching relationship (Serad, 2010; Andersen, 2009) with the general conclusion that horses can provide a 'mirror' to give feedback to a client. Other aspects noted where that the horse supports the coachee to come into contact with their emotions and can act as a living metaphor. Horses have also been used to develop the ability of student Occupational Therapists to develop their tolerance to ambiguity (Murphy & Wilson, 2017), to develop leadership competencies (Pohl, 2015) and the development of EQ in health care professionals (Dyk & Cheung, 2013).

The act of riding has been used as a personal journey into transformative learning (Mathison & Tosey, 2008) and one article looks at how EAL can be used specifically in satisfying the different learning needs of millennial employees. "It is an experiential approach to learning in which the presence of the horse can help people to become more reflective and intuitive, and to think seriously about preconceived ideas of leadership and communication." (Meola, 2016, p. 35). Meola goes on to state that "One reason EAL programs offer immediate results and long-lasting changes is that people are more accepting of feedback from an animal-human relationship than they are of feedback from a human-human interaction. The feedback employees receive in the moment comes from the non-judgmental perspective of a horse." (2016, p. 300)

However, this area is not well researched. The most relevant article I could find was by June Gunther. She is probably one of the most experienced and well qualified exponents of experiential learning with horses in a corporate leadership context. She has a master's in industrial psychology and a doctorate in adult education. She has been developing leaders for over 30 years. Her most recent article is a short study which looks at the equine assisted portion of a leadership development programme with healthcare professionals in the US. (Gunter, et al., 2016)

The article is interesting on a number of counts: firstly, there is a useful and succinct description of how horse herds distribute leadership for the survival of the whole with a connection made to how

leaders in the workplace need some of the same skills and attributes. There is an interesting model which talks about these attributes being such things as paying attention; to the environment, to the other herd members; Clear direction being both lead from the front and support from the back and sides, not just one person's prerogative, focused energy which includes understanding about what pace is required and congruence i.e. that the horse's internal motivation needs to be congruent with the good of herd.

Secondly she has asked some very simple but straightforward questions (page 4 of the article)

1. 'Describe your most vivid recollection from your Teaching Horse experience in terms of the effect it had on you while it was happening.'

2. 'What, if anything, was the impact of experientially practicing shared leadership with the horse and the team with whom you worked?'

3. 'What, if any, impact did your experience with Teaching Horse have on your workplace or other professional shared leadership efforts?'

For each question there was between 80-90% positive responses (as defined by the authors out of a sample of 110 participants spread over three cohorts. There were small numbers of people who report mixed or negative responses typically fourto eight% of respondents for each question. The reasons ranged from discomfort or scepticism around horses or perceived vulnerability working in a visible way, in front of colleagues or team mates, not yet being able to see long term or visible impact of the development on their normal working lives. Most of the quotes validated the model of the different aspects of shared leadership e.g. that it is not always the person at the front who is leading, and the ideas around energy and focused attention being powerful tools when leading from different positions.

Thirdly there were a number of words or phrases that jumped out at me. For example, the word 'noticing' was used a number of times and chimes with other concepts that are popular around leadership at the moment such as focused attention and the practice of awareness, mindfulness, consciousness etc. I find being around the horses, people can learn to 'notice' quite quickly! This may be because of heighten arousal associated with a novel experience. Also the fact that the experiential element with the horses was termed 'disruptive' and 'novel'. Positively disruptive is a phrase I have used myself and for me links to the idea of heightened arousal above. But I have also found that even when working with highly experienced equestrians for whom the experience is not novel in its broadest sense, and there is often not the emotion of anxiety associated with that kind of novelty, they still have profound and moving experiences.

What the academic literature adds to the popular literature about how horses can be used in development is rigour. There is a tendency in the way that some practitioners describe how horses can support leadership development which borders on the mystical. If this method of developing leaders is to become more main stream it needs to be credible. By looking at experiential leadership development with horses, how it is practiced and what underpins that practice, it is my aim to contribute to that credibility

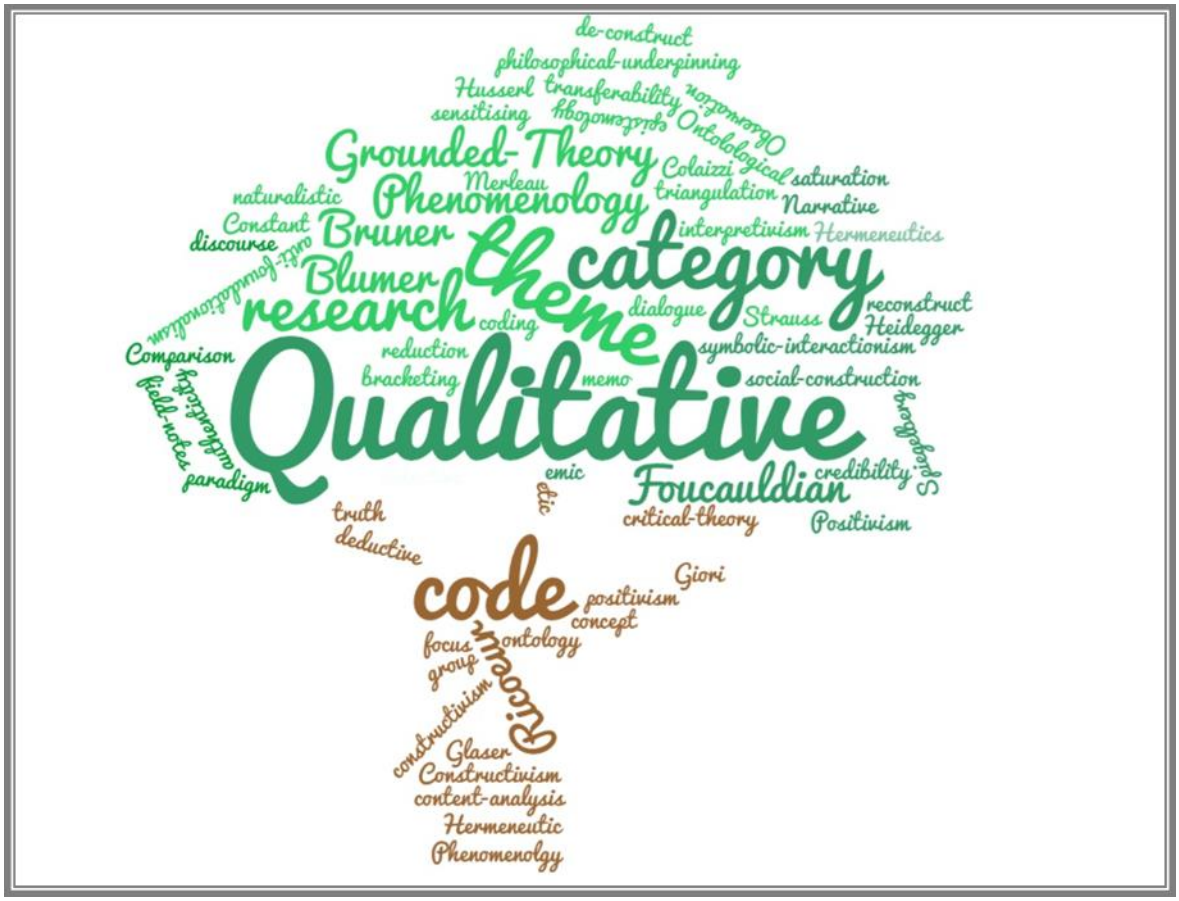
## CONCLUSION

By exploring this knowledge landscape it has highlighted a number of things. In particular it has reinforced to me that there is no one body of knowledge or practitioner that draws all this information together in a coherent way. It also highlights to me that it is both complex and evolving, particularly when the fields of experiential and embodied learning connect with transformational

and vertical learning; the skills and abilities needed to facilitate and hold that kind of learning in both physically and emotionally safe ways; and the increasingly subtle and complex needs of leaders in the 21st century. This is all using a relatively new method, i.e. that of using the natural responses of horses, a non-human, sentient other to provide the central experience around which all this revolves.

What the above review of my and the wider knowledge landscapes has done is to help me articulate the foundations for my perspective on what 'good' facilitation looks like. It also grounds this in my understanding of the related field of learning, particularly adult, experiential learning in the context of leadership development. My knowledge landscape has been outlined to enable me to know the ground I am standing on to review the broader and more academic sources of literature. This wider knowledge landscape enables me to start to answer my research question of : 'How do exemplars think about how they facilitate; and what if anything can we learning from existing practice of facilitating experiential leadership development?' and to start to bring together these separate threads in a more coherent whole.

# 3. Chapter Three: Methods and Methodology




## 3.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter will outline my thought process in designing this research; the choices that I made and the dilemmas I encountered. I will set out the philosophical ground for the approach that I took as well as the practical steps and tools used. One of my main aims in this study was to get a better understanding of how EALD practitioners think about this kind of facilitation. By holding this firmly in mind I began to explore what positions, perspectives, methods and methodologies would best help me to answer that question.

## 3.2 EPISTEMOLOGY – THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

My initial reading into research methods and methodologies began with Michael Crotty's work on the foundations of social research (Crotty, 1998). I had always assumed that I came from a constructionist or interpretivist paradigm, but I was fascinated by reading about positivism and its later restatements. Whilst positivism has largely been abandoned from social research, its legacy lives on in post-positivism. This seeks to acknowledge and compensate for some of its limitations such as the necessarily subjective nature of being a researcher e.g. "All of our observing is done within a horizon of expectation and is therefore necessarily selective." p33 (Crotty, 1998).

### 3.2.1 POST POSITIVISM AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

I was particularly interested in what post-positivism may be able to offer, not necessarily just from a research perspective, but curious about some of the facilitation methods that are used in EALD such

as the practice of 'clean' language and observation. I.e. reporting the macro and micro body language of the horse and not interpreting it further or even intervening. My curiosity is whether these practitioners do so from a philosophical position that the meaning is there, inherent in the situation. If this were the case, and it was not for some other more prosaic reason, it would have implications for the role of the facilitator. For example, there may be very little need for a facilitator at all, their role may be more health and safety if the meaning was already present and knowable. I will explore more my understanding of the post-positivist epistemology and my reasons for choosing a social constructionist approach later.

My understanding of the social constructionism is that meanings are not independent of the people that hold them. Meaning is created by people who are interacting with the world and each other (Crotty, 1998; Refai, et al., 2015; Robson, 2011). The focus of any research with this as an underpinning is how people experience the world and themselves in that world. Each person's reality is not only mediated predominantly by language which is socially constructed, it is also influenced by their culture, history and a myriad other factors. The notion of objectivity that is prevalent in post-positivist research and there being a definitive reality is perhaps invalid from this perspective.

Relevance of constructivism

One outcome of this research is to create a generative conversation amongst practitioners by giving them a greater understanding of how established practitioners work. There may be many influences on their ways of working, and many ways to make sense of how they operate. The lived experience of how this work is practiced is subjective. My wish is to surface the way that exemplars of EALD think about how the practice and distil how they make sense of that. The social constructionist paradigm seemed most relevant to achieve this (Refai, et al., 2015) (Cunliffe, 2016). From this, and an examination of existing practices of facilitation, adult education and experiential learning, I hope to create a wider conversation with other practitioners. Each one will still have to make sense of the research findings from their own unique perspective, but at least it should get them thinking.

Indeed, many aspects of this study are socially constructed by their nature. In particular the way that a facilitator goes about constructing their reality in relationship with not only their clients, but with the horses as well. Facilitator meaning making can be partly based on knowledge of horse behaviour, but as no-one yet speaks 'horse', that too has to be an interpretation. (Hempfling, 2001) (Roberts, 1997) (Wendt, 2011) (Parelli, 2003). And to quote one of my participants "There's a load of old bollocks talked about ears!" Even with a strong behaviourist underpinning, each practitioner may have different ways to interpret such a prevalent physical cue as a horse's ears. The paradigms within which these proponents of horsemanship sit are vastly different e.g. from cowboys and working horses to classical dressage and behaviourists. The meaning that a facilitator places on a particular horse behaviour will be influenced by where they get their knowledge of horse behaviour from. Each facilitator will also have other sources of data such as history of work experience, theoretical foundations as a facilitator, implicit or explicit models of leadership or learning.

The meaning that a client makes when reflecting on their own and the horse's behaviour is constructed and the skilled facilitator can support that process and thus it becomes a social process. In fact, you could argue that the meaning is being socially constructed between the client and the horse, though this is on a much less cognitive or linguistic level. These are often deeper forms of 'knowing' (Heron, 1999) that produce a felt sense of understanding. Heron talks about the imaginal forms of knowing that may have resonances with past experiences, and may be expressed through imagery or metaphor. These all sit within a social and cultural context. The layers of socially constructed meaning that have the potential to make this a rich, complex and challenging study.

### Implications for methodology

Initially and in conversation with my supervisor, I did consider elements of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1965). In its original form it emerged from a positivist paradigm, and can be considered by many as post-positivist. (Parry, et al., 2014; Robson, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Siebert, 2016) This was very much a product of the era in which it was originated. At the time it was a departure from the quantitative methodologies associated with social science research. These were most definitely still rooted in the 'reality is objective, waiting to be discovered' perspective. However, the reading I did around it (Crotty, 1998) (Charmaz, 2008) suggested to me that whilst it was a methodological departure, epistemologically, it was still too close to positivism.

The interpretative and constructionist epistemologies can be fraught with eye-watering complexities of cultural embeddedness, language, power and history etc. The post positivist concept of knowledge had a preliminary appeal. Robson (Op.Cit p22) summarises the key elements of the paradigm which were appealing at first to my novice researcher eyes. In particular the acknowledgment of culture, power etc., but with an emphasis on maintaining objectivity to guard against those potential biases. I realised that my initial attraction and desire to understand more about this way of thinking was based on some very outdated notions.

### Prior education and embedded assumptions

As an occupational psychologist, I had concepts such as validity and reliability drummed into me during my Master's degree. It came as a surprise to me however, when reading Ponterotto (Ponterotto, 2013) who asserted that many psychologists who conduct research do not have a thorough appreciation of epistemology. According to him and Morrow (Morrow, 2005), this is because qualitative methods and the associated philosophical underpinnings are often not taught, or not taught thoroughly. This made sense to me as my education had primarily involved looking at quantitative methods and the use of statistical analysis. So it was no wonder that I was mistakenly under the impression that I had to justify my approach through the lenses of validity and reliability. I.e. the validity of my results would need to pass the tests of content or predictive validity – is it measuring what I think it is measuring? Or the reliability of being able to measure the same thing twice. This lead to further investigation about what the related concepts were in a qualitative context. These will be covered in more detail under methodology.

### Epistemology and research aims

The social constructionist approach fits with the nature of the questions I am asking, i.e. about individuals' experience of themselves in the process of facilitating others. From that I am trying to understand what might emerge from those conversations that could be applicable to other practitioners. Whilst, as a practitioner of EALD myself, I have considerable prior knowledge and experience, I am not testing out a theory. Nor am I trying to remove my own voice from the research. The conversations I have had with fellow practitioners have been a mutual and respectful co-construction of meaning. My desire is that this is the beginning of a wider conversation with other practitioners. The way I look at the world, but specifically this research, is fundamentally social constructionist. For me it is essential that sense making is done jointly and with curiosity and criticality. In this research, my natural inclination, when others have expressed views that are different to mine has been to think: 'How interesting. I wonder why?' It was important for me to consider other perspectives, to ensure that my choices were conscious ones. In the end coming back to the social constructionist epistemology, with renewed clarity, was the only choice.

# METHODOLOGY

In this section I will outline the questions I am trying to answer and why I chose the methodology of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to do so. I will also consider issues of credibility and establishing the quality and trustworthiness of this research. In particular I will look at the methodological considerations of being a participant in my own research.

**To reiterate:**

| | Aims | Objectives | Research Questions |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Get a better understanding of how exemplars think about how they practice EALD. | • Get clarity on what underpins the practice of EALD from different experienced practitioners<br>• Articulate the bodies of knowledge they are drawing from | • What underpins how they facilitate this work?<br>• What bodies of knowledge do they draw on?<br>• Is it just facilitation or are there other fields that are important?<br>• What role does the horse play and how is that different to other forms of experiential learning? |
| 2 | • Understand if there are similarities between how these exemplars approach EALD and existing theory and practice of facilitating experiential leadership development | • Look at the similarities and differences between the practice of EALD and existing theory and practice of facilitating experiential learning with leaders. | • What if anything can we learn from existing theory and practice?<br>• What is unique to working with horses?<br>• What does that mean for developing the practice of EALD? |
| 3 | • Create a generative conversation about what it means to do leadership development with horses well. | • Set out a curriculum to provide the basis for a generative conversation on practitioner development. | • What existing forms of developing facilitation could be drawn on?<br>• What would need to supplement this to support the development of practitioners in the field of EALD? |

In order to understand both the espoused theory and the theory in use (Argyris, 1991) I propose to both interview (espoused theory) and video to use a catalyst for further conversation by supporting enhanced recall and checking out theory in use.

## Research Questions

Crotty, (op.cit) advocates starting with the research questions before settling on a methodology and method. At first I struggled with this, but came to realise that was indeed what helped me to settle on IPA as a methodology. My research questions were refined over a number of months in conversations with colleagues. My first two aims are to get a better understanding of how exemplars think about how they practice EALD and similarities between how these exemplars approach EALD and existing theory and practice of facilitating experiential leadership development. The three broad questions I started with were:

1) What are the core elements of good facilitation?
2) What other third parties could we learn from?
3) What is the impact of a non-human third party?

In order to reduce the range of questions and focus the research, at the outset of my data gathering phase my questions were:

- How are you (do you need to be) different as a facilitator when you are working with a horse?
- What do you need to be in tune with, within yourself, the horse and learner to do this work well?
- What do I mean by doing this work well? What assumptions underlie that standpoint?
- What assumptions do we as facilitators make about good facilitation? And do they stack up when you are working with a horse?"
- What is the role of language and other ways of making sense in experiential learning?

These are predominantly based around the first core question, that of good facilitation, and fit under the first objective of getting clarity on what underpins this work. As the data has been gathered, some of my initial formulation of questions based around the other two core questions have resurfaced as useful supplementary ones. (see Appendix A for the original formulation of questions).

In particular I was struck by the role of the horse as being the source of data from which the facilitators take their cues. So, whilst my initial question was around the role of the horse in eliciting in the moment responses in the client, the client is also eliciting responses in the horse. The specific questions around having a non-human, but sentient third-party have arisen even though not asked about specifically. In particular, sensitivity to energetic cues and issues around familiarity with horses and the important considerations around safety. This connects particularly to my third objective, that of understanding the similarities (and differences) between EALD and other forms of experiential leadership development

## Epistemology and methodological choices:

As EALD is a growing method of providing that experiential learning for leaders, it was my concern that if this work was not done well, it may damage the credibility of this powerful approach. The big question is: "How is EALD practiced currently?" The aim of this research is to understand how it is practiced currently and to see how or indeed if, that relates to existing understanding of the practice of facilitation in other contexts. The two main methodologies I considered, as mentioned above, were Ground Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1965) and IPA (Smith, et al., 2009). I briefly looked at case studies as a possible methodology. Though my sample is small, the approach of just looking at a hand full of relatively homogeneous cases seemed too structured and without the necessary flexibly to go more deeply. As Knapp states, case study designs are "…more structured, less emergent end of qualitative inquiry…" (Knapp, 2017, p. 30). Equally there are elements of grounded theory in terms of method, though this is not a deductive study, I am not primarily trying to establish a new theory. I am looking at what existing theories can offer this particular aspect of facilitating experiential learning, but without explicitly 'testing' them.

Ground Theory, at its first formulation, was attempting to reduce the gap between the research and the theory (See Charmaz, p84 op. cit), indeed the researcher and the researched. However, as a practitioner researcher, this gap was still too large. Whilst proponents of it hold that it has both positivistic and constructivist elements, it wasn't as adaptable as I needed it to be. The strict adherence to particular tools and techniques seemed unduly restrictive. As outlined in the

epistemology section, the post-positivist leanings meant that, methodologically, Grounded Theory wasn't going to support me in answering the questions I was asking.

### Why Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis?

In looking for other methodologies, I began to read about phenomenology and its associated methodology of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). (Smith, et al., 2009) (Moustakas, 1994). IPA fits within a constructivist epistemology for me because it takes each person's experience as unique with its own layers of meaning created by interaction with a complex world that is culturally and historically situated. Max Van Manen has a particular, lyrical way of expressing the focus of phenomenological inquiry:

"In the encounter with things and events in the world, phenomenology directs its gaze towards the regions where meanings and understanding originate, well up….through the porous membrane of past sedimentations….it can only be pursued while surrendering to a state of wonder" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 27).

He talks also of the lived now and the natural attitude where the question is essentially 'what was it like for you to have that experience?'. Ideally this experience would somehow be expressed or explored 'raw' as best as possible. That is why Van Manen also advocates exploring not just cognitively but physically too, the 'unknowing knowing of our bodies' (ibid p41)

This last point particularly resonated with me as part of my experience has been that trying to describe and explain what it is like to work with horses as a facilitator always came back to some sort of somatic and/or felt sense. There is also a largely somatic and experiential element to how participants or recipients of EAL experience it. This is similar to John Heron's expression of the experiential way of knowing as the 'direct acquaintance' with one's experience of an event, not mediated by language, but felt. (Heron, 1999). So, with this in my mind, I put my questions through this lens to see if the philosophy of phenomenology fitted.

The phenomenon I am attending to in this study is the lived experience of facilitating learning in partnership with a horse and to explore more deeply the essential nature of this lived experience. Van Manen talks about seizing our conscious life and 'giving reflective expression to it' (p.36). This seems particularly relevant as developing a reflective practice (Schon, 1991) is an essential part of my practice as a facilitator. However, those with whom I have engaged, both as participants in this research and other practitioners, a genuinely reflective practice was sporadic at best. So to have a research methodology that supported reflection and a co-operative meaning making endeavour seemed particularly useful. This ensures that I meet my objectives of firstly understanding what underpins their practice and then being able to articulate the bodies of knowledge they are drawing on.

### Pros and cons of IPA

As an insider researcher I am uniquely placed to inquire with other professionals into their practice. I was particularly struck by two aspects of the IPA approach as outline by Smith and Osborn; firstly that there was an expressed intent to 'get alongside' participants to understand their lived experience: "understanding in the sense of identifying or empathising with and understanding as trying to make sense of" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. p53). My position as a practitioner made the identifying with easy, though not falling into the trap of thinking I understood more than I did, was difficult. The ability to bracket my own assumptions and interpretations was a challenge and was a constant theme for reflection throughout the whole process.

I also chose to be a participant myself in this process with colleagues stepping into role of interviewer. This enabled me to be explicit about what my understanding and assumptions were, so as to better see when they may be influencing the interpretation of other participants. The second aspect was that of being able to ask critical questions. Throughout my analysis I have been able to make use of critical reflection and questions to get a deeper understanding of each participant. The compilation of a 'life world' for each case has also enabled me to get a better understanding of what might have influenced that person's experience and their practice.

I knew that the likelihood was that my sample would be relatively small, as there a limited number of people who do mainly Equine Assisted Leadership Development in the UK. And an even smaller number of those have been doing so consistently for many years. From an IPA perspective, as long as the sampling is purposive in order to gain insights and different perspectives a particular experience, then sample size is not an issue. The participants chosen need to be able to provide an insight into their experience of this phenomenon, and their accounts would need to be analysed in detail. The idea being that depth not breadth is the aim of this kind of research.

The interview process in IPA is to set a broad question with prompts for inquiry to enable enough flexibility to delve into essence of each person's experience. This feature is particularly relevant as the phenomenon in question, facilitating EAL, cannot always be expressed easily in language. This is in part, due to the experience being in some ways more felt rather than thought. It may also be that the experience needed to do the work well means that much of the expertise has become intuitive and not subject to a great deal of linguistic processing.

The explicitly interpretative nature of the methodology was also appealing as a way to bring my voice as an experienced facilitator and EAL practitioner into the study, without privileging it. Though this was a fine line to tread. As an insider- researcher I was in a position to interview my participants in a more knowledgeable and discursive manner than an outsider researcher. However, my commitment to reflexivity and checking my assumptions about how I was making meaning was an essential element of using this particular approach. The disciplines associated with applying the methods will be discussed on more detail under the method section. Suffice it to say, the choice to use IPA as a methodology was not without its complications.

## TRUSTWORTHINESS: CREDIBILITY, TRANSFERABILITY AND BEYOND

With a methodology such as IPA, the openly interpretative nature of the approach could easily lead to the results being questioned if rigour in the application of the method is not demonstrated. In this section I will discuss the qualitative equivalents of validity and reliability, and look at what needs to be attended to if this research is to be received as trustworthy, credible and transferable.

The most often cited (Shenton, 2004; Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto, 2013) works in this area are by Guba and Lincoln (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) which looks at credibility, transferability, and confirmability as parallel to validity and reliability concepts in quantitative studies. Shenton lists 14 different factors that may contribute to credibility of a research project. Before looking at these in more detail, I want to briefly touch on what is meant by credibility and to whom it matters.

The common sense definition of credibility is that of something being believable, convincing or trustworthy. To have 14 factors that contribute to that seems like an overcompensation. Of the works I have read around methodology, I was particularly struck by Parry et.al (Parry, et al., 2014) who were reviewing the way that leadership research had been conducted over the previous 25 years in their journal. Essentially they were saying that qualitative methods make up approximately

24% of research articles they published. Given that this is now 2018, one would hope that would be a higher proportion. However, what I wonder is if the exaggerated emphasis on 'proving' that a study is credible is an implicit assumption that qualitative methods are not a robust as quantitative ones? This is what prompted my question of 'to whom does credibility matter?'

This is not to say that credibility is not important, but the different stakeholders and recipients of this research may well view it differently. The fellow practitioners and other lay people who read the outputs of this research are more likely to be concerned about whether they can trust me, as the researcher. Interpersonal trust is a far more fragile thing. One definition of this kind of trust is that "…it is a combination of integrity, benevolence and ability." (Poorkavoos, et al., 2016, p. 8). Those reading this research are probably more concerned with whether I have the ability to do this research and that I would be doing so thoroughly and with positive intent. As I am both a practitioner of EALD and an established facilitator at a well-regarded management institute, this should go some way to evidencing my ability.

The fact that I am an Occupational Psychologist and this research is being conducted at a recognised British University under supervision, should also bolster this. Whilst I am clear that my intentions are positive and that the purpose of this research is to improve the standard of practice, this may be less easy to evidence. This is one of the ethical considerations that I am mindful of. The power afforded to me by being a member of an influential organisation is something that I have to use carefully. It may give the research more prominence, and it will be vital that this is seen to be done in a way that is not self-serving.

### Credibility

Credibility also has to be evidenced to satisfy the demands of an academic institution with its own standards and reputation to uphold. This is in part about giving sufficient detail about the thought process and practical steps taken to give confidence in the conclusions I draw. The issue is finding the right balance between academic rigour and real world application. As a practitioner researcher, my aim is not to follow an academic path and publish in peer reviewed journals. However, I do need to have sufficient rigour to enable me to do so if I choose to. Morrow (op cit) makes some interesting points about the desire to find equivalence for validity and reliability, as being a post-positivist construct. As such I will address as many of the criteria mentioned above that seem relevant to this research, with some adaptations as suggested in Morrow.

Of 14 elements of credibility in Shenton (op. cit), a number stand out and I will look at them in more detail.

- Established methods
- Familiarity with context
- Reflective commentary
- 'Triangulation' or different data sources
- Qualification
- Member checks

*ESTABLISHED METHODS:* this is an interesting one, which may at first appear simple. As this is my first major piece of research, part of what I am learning is how studies have been conducted before and what approaches have been taken. In particular I have looked to the methods outlined in IPA, and have adhered to them as best I can. However, with each new phenomenon to be studied, slightly different approaches may need to be taken, and so departures from established methods are inevitable. In fact Smith et. al (Smith, et al., 2009) encourage the researcher to experiment and find

their own way to work with the rich and complex data that IPA generates. So whilst the methodology may be consistent, the methods may vary. By outlining below my experience with the IPA steps I have taken, the links to an established method can be clearly seen. When there has been a departure, the guiding principles of the methodology have been useful in orientating that move. This has required me to grasp the established method, but also be critically reflective on it to adapt it thoughtfully to this new study

*FAMILIARITY WITH CONTEXT:* In this study, familiarity of context is a double edged sword. It is important that I understand the background and context within which my participants sit. This helps with gaining access to participants and their willingness to trust me as a fellow practitioner as well as researcher. However, it does mean that I have to be particularly watchful of assumptions that I know more about their context than I actually do. This seems also to connect with what Morrow describes as '*verstehen' (p253*) or to what degree is the participants' meaning understood deeply. IPA is particularly suited to addressing this issue in that it encourages you to construct a 'life world' for each participant. This enables me to make some educated guesses about the impact of their particular history and context has had on their meaning making. It also enables me as the researcher to check in with how my context actually differs, and thus be mindful of the assumptions I could be making. For me, this goes hand in hand with reflexivity.

*REFLECTIVE COMMENTARY:* For me, whilst the intent in the post-positivist paradigm is for the researcher to capture their emerging thought process, in qualitative research this needs to go deeper and become more truly reflexive. In my understanding of IPA I have captured both my take on each participant's life world, but also my reflections on the impact I am having and where my assumptions are coming from. This is a more difficult, but rewarding approach. In IPA this process is described as bracketing and a process of making assumptions and biases explicit. This is part of the reason that I am a participant in my own study. The act of being interviewed by a colleague with my prompt questions enabled me to describe my position, assumptions and beliefs fully. I then put these transcripts to one side in terms of analysis, but kept them to refer to when reflecting on my meaning make process with the other participants. This is articulated by a column on each transcript, which captures my thoughts and reflections, purely from my perspective, so that I can account for how this may be influencing my interpretations.

*TRIANGULATION:* in the more constructivist paradigm this equates more to fairness (see Morrow op.cit p252) in that different perspectives need to be solicited and honoured. In this study, this has been demonstrated by interviewing each participant once and then videoing them practicing, with a second interview using the video to support Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) (Meekums, et al., 2016) (Macaskie, et al., 2015). This enabled me as researcher and the participant to view aspects of the video again and to jointly inquire into it. This supported both a deeper conversation about their experience of practicing EAL, and helped me to understand what interpretations or judgements I had made.

*QUALIFICATION:* as mentioned above, my qualification is primarily as a practitioner, with the fact that this doctoral study is done with supervision.

*MEMBER CHECKS:* this is an interesting one, as whilst it appears common practice, there seems little consensus that it makes any difference to the quality of the research. Instead it seems to be a limited source of additional data. In part this has been covered in the research design by the second interview, and also by sending participants a summary of my first stage analysis of the first interview. So far, only 4 people have responded, with a very brief 'yes that's accurate'. Whilst the researcher's interest and devotion to the topic may be boundless, that can't be said for all participants. As busy

people, the practical burden of reviewing and responding is unlikely to lead to a huge amount of additional data.

## METHOD:

This section will outline the detailed steps that I took to collect and analyse the data and how I have applied the IPA methodology.

### SAMPLING- CRITERIA AND DEALING WITH LIMITATIONS OF A RELATIVELY SMALL SAMPLE

My first objective is to get a better understanding of what underpins the practice of exemplars, both from an espoused and enacted theory held by experienced practitioners who have more than a short course in EALD methods underpinning their practice. The term 'experienced' has some assumptions in it that meant my sample was relatively small, these are outlined below under criteria. However, this was consistent within an IPA methodology in that these relatively rare individuals could provide depth of experience and rich data. The question implies that practitioners are facilitators (and for this research that means facilitating adults, in leadership positions, learning experientially) as opposed to counsellors or therapists. This is important in that many people have come to Equine Assisted Learning through a therapeutic route, and are often still working with clients in that frame.

Through my connections with a number of organisations who operate as either training providers or professional associations , I recruited 3 participants as exemplars. I then asked them to provide the name of 1 other facilitator that matched my criteria in a snowball sampling method. [1]

#### CRITERIA USED:

- Is involved in Equine Assisted Leadership development regularly i.e. has a number of corporate clients and does repeat business with those clients. This gives confidence that they are predominantly working in this field and that their practice is sufficiently robust as to generate impact such that the clients would come back for more.
- Is recognized by peers as being experienced in the field of EAL with leaders. This helped to support the first criteria in that reputation is generated and sustained within a community who understand the practice as well as the purchasers of those services

Additionally

- Has training in related areas such as L&D, Executive Coaching, Facilitation, NLP, Gestalt. This was to give confidence that their practice was underpinned by a body of knowledge.
- Has significant (five to ten years +) experience of the working within L&D, Exec Coaching etc. This was to give confidence that if intuition was cited as part of the approach that this could be considered reliable (see Sadler-Smith in the literature review)

As mentioned above, there are a limited number of practitioners in the UK who have experience of doing predominantly equine assisted leadership development. There are many who practice predominantly as therapists, and may do some work with corporate clients. I have deliberately excluded these practitioners as the therapeutic paradigm is significantly different to that of most leadership development. At its simplest level, in leadership development there is generally an assumption of wellness and the desire to enhance existing capability and performance or release

[1] See Appendix B for invitation to participate letters

nascent potential. Whereas in many therapeutic approaches there is often an assumption of dysfunction.

Whilst I was initially concerned about the sample size, I did reflect on what Smith et.al. (Smith, et al., 2009) said about the emphasis on large sample sizes being a hangover from quantitative methods. The depth and fullness of data that can be gained from practitioners who have significant experience of working as EAL facilitators (15 years or more in some cases), has meant no shortage of material to work with. I also have used video and a second interview with some of the participants to gain greater depth and subtlety of understanding. In the end, I had 7 participants, including myself who fit the criteria and were willing to participate.

## DATA GATHERING- INTERVIEWS AND USE OF VIDEO

The initial in-depth interviews were conducted face to face with one Skype interview with a participant based in the USA. These ranged in length from one and a quarter to two hours. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Each was loosely structured with a number of broad questions that enabled further exploration[2]. The questions began with a simple exploration of background and how each participant had come to facilitating with horses. This opening question established rapport, but also gave useful information that went into compiling a 'life world' for each participant. These were particularly useful in the analysis phase. The intent with each interview was for it to be experienced as a conversation where meaning could be teased out. Some participants had done a lot of reflection on their own practice previously and so could articulate their thoughts and practice well. Though on the whole, most participants found that it was hard to articulate why they did what they did.

The questions were developed iteratively over time and changed slightly for each interview. For example, my initial 'rapport building' question of how each participant came to be an EAL practitioner yielded some useful and unexpected data. So in subsequent interviews this question was lingered over longer with more follow up questions. Similarly, asking about a typical session uncovered more than simple procedural details. Each question whether intentionally or not, elicited complex and subtle stories that spoke to that participant's lived experience. This often included bodily sensations, gut feel, emotions, internal thought processes and intuitions. Unsurprisingly, this was difficult to articulate for some and left both researcher and participant with a slight feeling of dissatisfaction. This was largely expressed as 'I'm sorry, I can't put it another way, it just happens'. This was perhaps to be expected when inquiring into the practicing of a skill set that is largely 'in the moment' and not always easily put into language. The follow up questions, together with active listening and testing out understanding ambiguous terms was particularly useful. The fullness of the accounts from the first interview was surprising, with stories and explanatory anecdotes providing dense and fruitful detail.

Initially, the use of video and second interview was intended as a means of checking out theory in mind vs theory in use (Argyris, 1999). However, it quickly became apparent that the second interview which was conducted with the video as a prompt to aid interpersonal process recall (Kagan, 1965) (Larsen, 2008) enabled some of the participants to get back in touch with their experience and articulate certain aspects of it much more clearly. As Macaskie states:

"using IPR need not entail the reification of thoughts and feelings experienced earlier as objective data; rather, it opens up the possibility of exploring the unexplored and creating a new experience in the present…..both initial interview and IPR session invite and enable reflection on experience, thus

[2] See Appendix C for 1st Interview Prompt Questions

creating a mutually constructed experience that, in the moment, can be both experienced and understood simultaneously as co-constructed." (Macaskie, et al., 2015)

## ETHICS AND CONSENT

Four out of the seven participants were videoed either conducting a one to one session for an hour or so, or with a sections of a whole day being videoed. Two out of the remaining three were willing to be videoed, but struggled to get their client's to agree to the process. The impact of a video camera and third party was felt to be an intrusion into the process for their clients. Whilst this was an issue cited by two others, this was overcome by convening a special session for a contact who was interested in finding out more and experiencing a session for themselves. In the other case, I as the researcher was the participant which gave a fascinating insight into the experience from a different perspective. Every effort was made to ensure confidentiality and to reassure both participants and their clients had the right to withdraw their consent at any point[3]. However, for a number this was still not sufficient to gain informed consent. Two of the remaining three have offered to be videoed with colleagues when they next conduct a CPD session.

Each video was then reviewed in full, initially to check for quality of sound and picture. They were then reviewed in more depth having read the first interview transcript again. This was to look for examples of where the participant was either doing or not doing something they had said was part of their practice. It was also to look for particular instances of when the horse did or did not do something. This emerged as important due to the number of participants describing the horse behaviour as their primary source of information. Three or four short vignettes of the video (three-5 five minutes) were then selected to use as the video process recall elements of the second interview. Questions were also formulated to explore what had been observed. For those aspects that appeared counter to the stated approach the reasons for this were explored. For those aspects that appeared to be good examples of stated practice, questions to deepen the conversation were formulated.

In practice, each of the second interviews, though scheduled for an hour typically lasted two hours. The video was a hugely valuable starting point for rich conversations. The vignettes were watched, often several times with other parts of the video being requested to further aid recall and contextualisation. This normally prompted much deeper reflection and exploration on the part of the participant and was a useful catalyst. Each participant said that the process had been very useful for them professionally and one even suggested that it could be a useful method in developing other practitioners. These interviews were also recorded and transcribed.

## EXPERIENCE OF USING IPA AS A DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

### DESCRIPTION AND STAYING CLOSE TO THE DATA

The first task was to read and re-read the transcripts. In keeping with what Smith et al. recommend (op.cit chapter 5) to move from the descriptive to the interpretative, from the particular to the shared, I worked in depth with 1 transcript at a time. I listened to each interview again and began with several quick read throughs simply to gain familiarity. With the first transcript this was also noting what seemed relevant and starting to try and understand the participant's perspective. However, what I realised was this was confusing and frustrating as there wasn't a clear focus on the questions I was trying to answer. I had perhaps stayed too close to the detail of the data for too long

[3] See Appendix D for consent forms

and could no longer see the whole as well as the parts. This meant it was difficult to discern what was interesting and useful. This is one of the downsides of learning to be a researcher whilst also conducting research; not only are you trying to get familiar with a particular tool or method, but also trying to work with live and rich data. The cognitive overload was alleviated through supervision with my consultant who is a seasoned researcher.

### Working with the raw data

The sage advice to focus on the question and to be aware that not everything was going to be useful or needed to end up in the final analysis, lead to a revision of my strategy. I read the transcript and then highlighted bits of the text that seemed relevant to the questions that I was asking. I then had four additional columns. For my own comfort, I did a 'belt and braces' approach and the first column was a slightly edited version of what I had highlighted and stayed as true to the participant's own words as possible. The second column was first level sense making/interpretation which corresponds to what Smith et.al break down into Descriptive, Linguistic and Conceptual comments (Op.Cit p84). This included particular words or phrases and metaphors that may give insight into how the participant was thinking and making sense of their experience.

The question I was holding in mind when noting things in this second column was 'How does this person think about facilitating Equine Assisted Leadership Development?' or 'What would I need to know, think, feel or believe to facilitate like this person?'. What went into this column were key events, espoused beliefs and theories, stories that illustrated particular practices, values and descriptions of the felt experiences. These stayed close to the original words, but added a thin layer of interpretation to distil the essence of the experience. This was deliberate at this stage as I walked the fine line between practitioner and researcher. As Smith et al. say "what is important is that the interpretation was inspired by, and arouse from, attending to the participant's words…" (p90).

The third column were made up of my own thoughts and musing and connections to theory or my own practice. I wanted them to be present alongside the first level sense making and the initial concepts and themes, so that their influence could be seen and bracketed. It was a tough discipline to put aside my own thoughts and assumptions, and to check that the link between the interpretations I was making and the original words was still clear. However, this is one of the advantages of being a participant. It has meant that I could be full and explicit in what my own perspectives are and treat them as part of the data. This has enabled me to have a voice whilst not privileging it over others.

Other things were noted that, whilst seemingly tangential, may provide useful detail for that participant's 'life world'. This proved to be a particularly useful exercise as this data was valuable in trying to understand the meaning that each participant placed on different aspects of their practice. For example, one participant had had a challenging introduction to EALD and had felt that certain practices he witnessed were deeply against his values. There were explicit ways that this was evident in the transcript, but there were also more subtle ways that this was influencing aspects of his thinking and behaving.

### Moving from data and interpretation to themes and concepts

This portion of the analytical process was in some ways, the scariest, most confusing and ultimately fascinating. As Smith et.al (Op.Cit) suggest, this phase moves away from the focus on the transcript.

It now begins to incorporate, the initial interpretations and the exploratory notes made along the way. This was scary in that it meant I had to have confidence in my interpretations; that I was sure that the meaning I was making of their meaning making was sound. It was confusing because the iterative nature and in depth analysis had created a degree of cognitive overload and 'not being able to see the wood for the trees'. This was particularly so for the first transcript I tried to establish themes in. The first attempt was predominantly just a list of key words that did not appear to cohere at all. However, again in supervision, with an experienced researchers eye looking at the data, superordinate themes began to emerge.

### SUPERORDINATE THEMES

These superordinate themes were provisional at first, but helped to chunk the data down and organise the data somewhat. Within these broad themes, sub-themes and concepts also started to emerge. Immersing myself in the data in this way, whilst still keeping in mind the 'life world' and the familiarity I had built up with each transcript, meant that the story in the data finally began to emerge. It was a challenge to balance maintaining the integrity of the data from each participant, whilst still being able to connect across participants and make links to literature.

As I moved through the transcripts, some new superordinate themes came up, but many of them stayed consistent. This is not surprising in one way, as similar questions were asked about a largely similar experience. However, it did make me wary of the degree to which my ability to hold my confusion with the complexity had worn thin by this stage. Were these categories of convenience? The way I tested this out was to send a 'summary of practice' to each participant. This was essentially my first level interpretations organised under the headings of the superordinate themes. As mentioned previously with regards to member checks, the responses I had back were positive, if brief. This does not mean to say that other superordinate themes wouldn't be as relevant, but the pragmatist in me is content with them being 'good enough for now'.

### THEMES AND CONCEPTS

What was more varied across transcripts was the subtle differences in themes and concepts. For each participant I drew together all of the concepts and themes under each superordinate theme. By drawing all the themes and concepts together, it decontextualizes them and enabled a little more of my interpretation to come through. I was still concerned that this distilling and decontextualizing means, inevitably that something is lost. As Smith et. al say:

"At each stage the analysis does indeed take you further away from the participant and includes more of you. However, 'the you' is closely involved with the lived experiences of the participant – and the resulting analysis will be a product of both of your collaborative efforts (p92)

These summaries of themes and concepts were created with that participant's life world in mind. Whilst my interpretation was evident, it also enabled me to re-integrate some of the richness from the considerable amount of data from each participant.
The second interviews were treated in the same way so as to allow other themes to emerge should they appear. The process was slightly quicker as I was more confident that I was able to bracket my own assumptions and interpretations. In practice, what the second interviews provided were additional richness and nuance to the themes already developed through the first round interviews.

### Looking across participants to generate insights

This process was accomplished by putting each major theme and concept in a table labelled by participant. This enabled me to look across participants at a glance and see the similarities and differences in how that theme had manifested for them. This also allowed me to see how many participants shared concepts within a theme, and what remained unique to each one. To have all the data under each major theme enabled a complex picture of interrelated concepts to emerge. These have been expounded upon in the following chapter on Findings

### Ethical considerations

In such an endeavour as Equine Assisted Learning, the ethical considerations were always close to mind. This is not least due to the fact that physical safety is an ever present consideration. As already mentioned, the work can go deep very quickly and as such emotional safety is also paramount. Whilst consent was given by all the participants and their clients to be part of the research, the act of being observed does change the nature of the experience for all involved. I was mindful of this when observing participants working with their clients. Even when the sessions were set up specifically for research purposes and the intent was clear. Some of those sessions were quite emotionally charged. I was clear in setting up boundaries around confidentiality and informed participants of my data protection approach.

### Summary

After an exploration of different epistemologies, and the sage advice to stay focused on what was the most appropriate way to answer my question, I took a social constructionist stance. From this point, the choice was which was the most appropriate methodology. As I became clearer about my objective to understand what underpinned practice currently, and the intent to find out how EALD was thought about and practiced now, the choice of IPA became clearer too. I was clear that I did not want to create another orthodoxy, but a generative conversation. I was not seeking to define a new theory of EALD facilitation, but instead, to really understand how it was practiced now. The methods of IPA were particularly suited to working with an experience which is largely somatic and embodied. It enabled me to uncover the essence of that lived experience from a facilitator's perspective. The in depth, iterative and discursive approach to both data gathering and analysis yielded rich results; even if it was confusing and overwhelming at times. From that point I could meet my second objective which was articulate the bodies of knowledge my participants were drawing on. Then, to my third objective which was to look at the similarities with existing bodies of knowledge and theories in the related fields of Facilitation, Adult Learning and Leadership Development were sufficient to provide an underpinning of this specialist practice.

# CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

## OVERVIEW

This chapter looks at what came out of the data, with a focus on how each of the participants described their theories in mind as well as the practical application of those theories. The rich data is explored through the superordinate themes of Theory of Facilitation, Practice of Facilitation and Theory of Learning. Whilst there was a variety of different approaches within each of these themes, each participant could articulate an underpinning, coherent philosophy. The participants had different backgrounds, ranging from occupational psychology, NLP master practitioners, adult education and HR or Learning and Development in a corporate environment. Their experience of developing leaders ranged from 15-30+years. P with a number refers to each research participant. When referring to clients, they are the leaders who were experiencing the research participants' facilitation with horses. For clarity, P7 refers to my experience and comes from when I was interviewed by colleagues.

## KEY QUESTION

*My first two aims are to:*

- Get a better understanding of how exemplars think about how they practice EALD.
- Understand if there are similarities between how these exemplars approach EALD and existing theory and practice of facilitating experiential leadership development

*My overarching question, which encapsulates these aims was: "How do exemplars facilitate and think about their practice of EALD? What, if anything can we learn from existing theory and good practice?"*

## SUPERORDINATE THEMES

The process of iterative analysis, from an IPA methodological perspective, enables an absorption into each transcript as a whole and a familiarity with each part. The initial themes and concepts were formulated from the data, initial notes and preliminary interpretation. These superordinate themes then emerged when looking at each transcript as a whole. As Smith et.al comment, the further into the analysis you get, the more data you have and the further away from the initial data set you get. What this section tries to do is look at the themes that were common across 4 or more of the participants.

According to IPA, a theme does not have to be present in all transcripts for it to be noteworthy. However, with a relatively large data set for this kind of study, something that occurs in four out of seven participants will be looked at first. Other themes which contribute to answering the central research question, but which may only be present in two or three of the participants, will be included, but noted as such. This will enable me to look at the similarities and differences within each overarching theme. It may be that a concept or theme is expressed in different ways, or it may be that there are some more fundamental differences. In the discussion of what emerges, I will re-establish the participant voice with quotes, but also understanding gleaned from their life world and taking the transcript as a whole. In the next chapter I will make connections back to the literature, and indeed look for other sources which may further illuminate the findings.

There were three superordinate themes with three smaller, but distinct themes. The three main themes where the Theory of Facilitation or the beliefs, assumptions and models which underpinned

the way the participants thought about how they practiced. There was The Practice of Facilitation which looked at how that underpinning theory played out in practice. And there was the Theory of Learning which uncovered the assumptions and beliefs about the nature of experiential learning and the facilitator's role in that. The smaller themes that emerged were The Role of Horse, whilst central was almost a given for most participants so featured less in the first interviews; The Theory of Leadership and finally the Identity of the facilitator.

Each of these themes connect and overlap in various ways and the diagram below will outline the main connections

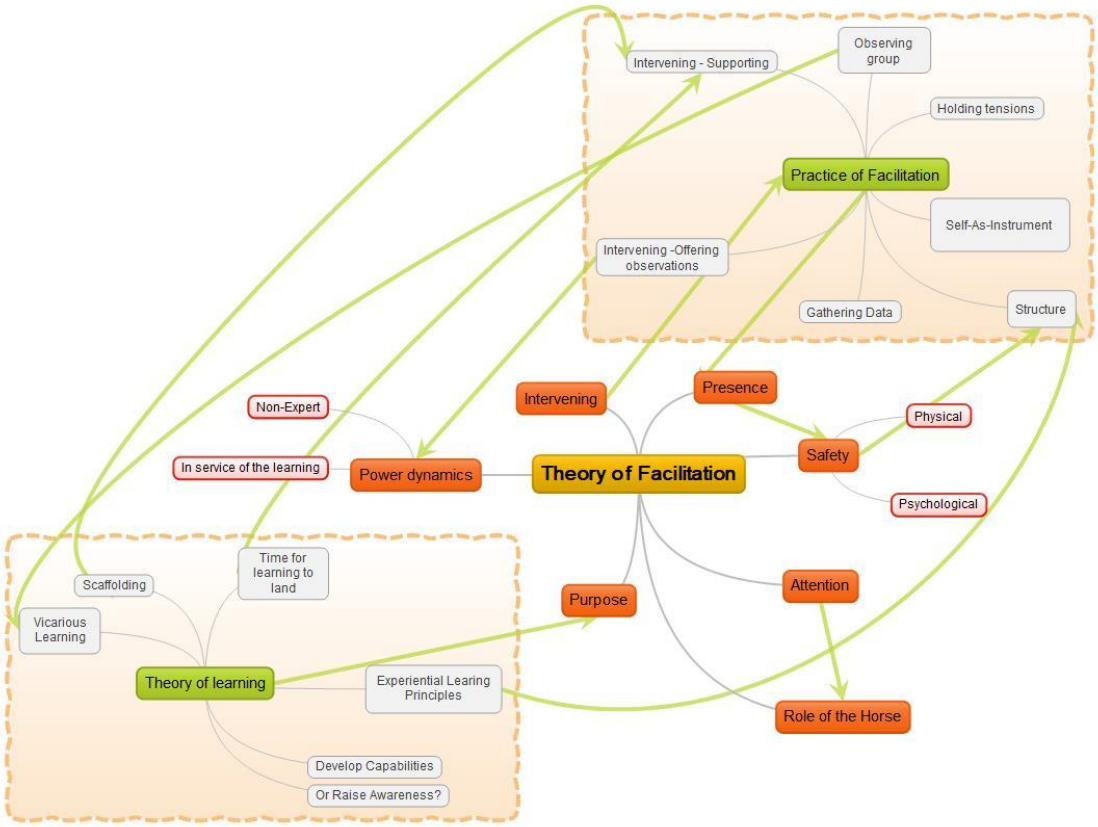



Figure 2: Mind Map of Theory of Facilitation Superordinate theme and connections with other themes

## THEORY OF FACILITATION

Understanding how exemplars think about their practice as facilitators is a primary aim of this research. So, their implicit and explicit theory of facilitation seemed like a good place to start. It was also a theme that was common across all participants, having been an explicit line of questioning. Some participants were able to articulate more depth and clarity than others. Those more able to articulate explicitly were usually participants who had significant prior experience as leadership

developers, either as coaches, facilitators or both. However, the implicit theories were also teased out from the descriptions of how each participant worked. There will be some overlap between the themes. The next superordinate theme, which is facilitation in practice, will look at how theory in mind, becomes action. The following concepts and themes have been gathered into clusters to organise the data into what seem to be related concepts. Other combinations could be argued for. However, these made sense to me as both practitioner and researcher, and the connections will be explored and tested.

### 4.4.1 THE BEING OF THE FACILITATOR - Presence, the holding of a space, connected to own felt sense, aware of self and other, being in service of/not about ego.

This cluster of related concepts seemed to be foundational to how each of the participants thought about their practice; the state they were in when facilitating. Each one of them described to varying degrees the experience of being present, in the moment, attuned to their own immediate physical, mental and emotional experience and to that of others. The 'other' was particularly focused on being attuned to the signals that the horses may be giving, with some giving emphasis to the client and environment as well. Being fully present is something that takes years of practice as anyone who has undertaken any mindfulness practice will attest. Interestingly, most participants also mentioned the experience as being tiring. The level of concentration needed to stay tuned in, for an extended period of time, is considerable. How the facilitators manage this both in the moment and longer term will be explored in practice of facilitation, under 'self-as instrument'.

*P1 pages 12/13 "as a facilitator you are in that space with your senses but also with your emotions; you are just in that place"*

*P3 page 27 "like being present, being grounded, finding compassion and love for whoever I'm working with"*

*P4 pages 14/15 "just to try and keep ourselves completely in the moment. So a lot of it for me is mindfulness exercises because my brain is going: 'what am I feeling, what can I see, what can I touch…- so it is just bringing you back into the present."*

*P5 page 10/11 "I think it is really important to try and de-clutter your own stuff. To get yourself out of what might be going on for you as a facilitator at that point so to just really be present with the client and with the horse in the field and not have anything else going on"*

Words or phrases that appeared either synonymous or at least closely related, included 'space' and 'being in the moment'. What was fascinating, whilst reading and rereading the transcripts, was the sense of each participant as being connected, open, calm and any number of other adjectives, but in their own ways. Some were quieter, others talked more, some gentle, others more forthright. Each embodied their individual, authentic presence. It seemed that whilst there may be common features like being aware of sensations in the body, openness to what emerged or working hard not to have preconceptions, there wasn't just one way of experiencing themselves as fully present.

As the quotes above illustrate, there were various techniques employed for getting into a state of presence. Some had perhaps been working on this for many years and it had become second nature. As P1 said *" you are just in that place."* And also (P1 page 21) on how they create a space:

*"not to have preconceptions, not have expectations, not anticipate where things are going or what the next question is going to be; I think you have to kind of empty yourself…"*

Others, like P3 had also been working on embodied techniques for being present for many years, at first out of necessity:

*P3 page 3 "when I was able to be present in my body he [The horse] was able to tolerate me more, but when my emotions drove me out of my body…. he wasn't fine…. I worked a lot when I was around him, let it go, be present in the moment, let go, own my emotions."*

One note of caution may need to be sounded here: there are downsides to being fully present in the moment. This came out particularly in the second interviews when participants had a video of themselves practicing to draw on. All participants who completed a second interview found the experience helpful because as P3 put it p2:

*"I can't remember what happened in the sessions last week! They're just gone. I'm there and then I'm not and then it's gone…"*

This has implications for reflective practice and how choices are made in the moment. P7 also mentions the attentional capacity required to concentrate and be fully in the moment for extended periods of time. However, the dilemma it could create was highlighted by P2:

P2 page 18/19 *" Its not like I'm saying, 'Oh this is 12 people, I've got to do this.' It makes me wonder if I'm just responding to what's in there….Because if I'm going 'I need to change something round because its 12' that's not useful to me, but if I'm just responding and that's doing it differently and its getting in the way of the learning then that's not useful either. So, if I'm going 'Oh hang on I do that for 1:1 and that for groups of 12', now I'm totally in trouble because I'm in the process in my head instead of being totally present with them.*

This may not be an issue that actually arises often, but it is worth being aware of. This may be one of the reasons that P6 and P3 have specific designs so that it frees up the capacity to respond, but within pre-set boundaries. It may also be that becoming adept at the attentional shifting needed to reflect in action is another skill set that has been developed. P3,4,5,6 and 7 all make various references to their internal thought processes as well as being present in the moment. However, it will be worth looking at further in the discussion, particularly at the idea of a 'flow' state.

Many of the participants had the explicit intention of supporting their clients to develop presence, to be in the moment and notice for themselves the self, other and environment. The development of heightened awareness, presence or emotional intelligence are common themes in leadership development and will be explored further in the discussion.

*P3 page 9 "helping whoever it is to drop down, it will help them be present or notice what is getting in the way of them being present."*

*P6 page 6 when leading in complexity "…you have to notice, So you need to know where your body is to keep yourself safe, … you have to pay attention to how they are responding to your greeting (so that is noticing the other) and you have to be able to notice the environment around you…"*

*P7 page 42 "How are you being when you are doing leadership and this is a great way to get incredibly pertinent feedback…So particularly thinking about impact and presence – if you want to really work on that level, work with the horses"*

Participants 2 and 7 mentioned role modelling presence as part of how they think about their practice. So it seems that there are 3 ways in which presence and being in the moment come into the thinking about practice. Firstly, the state a facilitator is in when they are facilitating; secondly supporting clients to be more present and in the moment themselves; finally, role modelling that presence.

Something else that perhaps links this cluster with the next is the attitude of being in service of or not being ego driven. This seemed to be part of the experience of presence, but also part of what helped to create emotional safety for clients. Whether this was described as 'emptying' oneself, or stepping back or more explicitly as being in service of the learner, the intent appeared to be the same. This may be a product of cultivating presence, or it could be a conscious technique that is applied. However, it seemed to be experienced as a letting go of something, of putting the needs of the clients before any personal needs to be seen as knowing or doing anything.

*P1 page 21 "I think you have to kind of empty yourself, not project your own stuff as much as possible"*

*P4 page 34 "I'm there to facilitate other people's insight not to share your own, essentially."*

*P6 page 11 "to be an educator, you have to love the learner as much, if not more, as your content. So that's what makes me notice what a learner needs….going beyond your ego into the service of the other, absolutely! That is it!"*

### 4.4.2 Safety

*physical, psychological, risk and learning. The role of the 'holding' environment, contracting, containers and boundaries, being directive/hierarchical*

The different aspects of safety came up universally. The first aspect mentioned was often about the physical safety. Each participant had slightly different perspectives on how to maintain physical safety; whether that was having horse handlers on hand or facilitators who could demonstrate for

clients how to do something with a horse safely, or simply making sure that clients knew enough to keep themselves safe around horses. Safety was sometimes given as the rationale for being quite directive at times, as well as for giving simple tasks when clients were interacting with a horse. For the most part the clients who come to these events will have little or no experience of being around horses. The point was made that it wouldn't be physically safe to ask them to do anything that required more than basic handling.

Emotional safety, the creation of a safe psychological space within which clients can experience, experiment and learn was expressed differently, but universally.

*P1 page 21 "I think to be non-judgemental, to keep the space safe physically and emotionally for the horse and for the person.."*

*P4 page 8 "very much just holding the space and being still – it's not asking too many questions, its being very sensitive to what's happening. Making it safe for someone to explore their thinking and what they are doing"*

*P5 purpose of role page 38 "So its safety in the very physical sense but also helping them to feel safe enough, looked after enough doing this with us, that they are open to learn and that they will be able to learn."*

This seems to link back to presence in that the idea of holding a space is through presence and the quality of attention that is given to the horse-human interaction. This seems to provide some non-intrusive support or protection, simply by being there, in the here and now. As explained by one participant, it was like creating a bubble around the client and the horse. The above quotes show some of the 'do's and don'ts' of how the facilitators create that safe space. The idea of being non-judgemental as a factor in creating this safe space, links to presence and self-awareness. It may sound simple to be non-judgemental, but is often more about noticing what our judgements are as they arise in the moment. The noticing and the choice to let them go, and maintain that presence is part of what makes the space safe.

Other participants articulated some more nuanced thinking about what made for a safe space. One aspect of this is about confidentiality. For P3 in particular, this was a key part of creating emotional safety. This may be that as a client is having an experience with a horse, the rest of the observing group is outside the physical boundary of the field. The facilitator would debrief with the client, out of earshot. When re-joining colleagues, the choice would be with the client as to what was shared. The element of choice is something that came up in a number of ways for a number of participants, but not always directly related to psychological safety. For some it was about a value of respect, or as a choice to let learners own their own learning. However, as with being non-judgemental and coming from a place of equality or 'non-expert', it seemed to contribute to that felt sense of safety and trust in them. So, perhaps it is not just setting the conditions for a safe space to be created, the being, the presence of the facilitator is part of what makes it so.

P6 and 7 were coming at psychological safety from different theoretical perspectives. P6, as an educator, articulated an in depth and subtle taxonomy of the conditions which are needed for a safe container to be created. Only when the container is created can learning occur. Here, container was

synonymous with space. These conditions are actually tensions which need to be held in balance. The two that were explored in more depth were around how the space needed to be both bounded and open; and hospitable and charged. They both begin to take us into the territory of intervening to a degree, which is the next cluster. However, their role in safety will be discussed here.

P6 is very clear that each session is bounded by an intent i.e. that there is a specific aim for each session and that means the content of the session will stay within that. The argument is that no matter what comes up, the focus will remain on e.g. attention. This maintains safety in that the conversation won't suddenly go into a place that wasn't agreed or contracted for, such as the client's childhood. The openness supports the safety indirectly in that the client and the facilitator can go wherever they need to go to support the learning. This flexibility and openness to what emerges shows adaptability and respect for the client's needs. To work emergently is a theme in its own right and will be returned to later.

The second tension hospitable and charged: In this context it relates to what most other participants have said which is about the physical safety. P6 also mentions about no-judgement, to support the psychological safety.

P6 page *12 "He (author) gives these paradoxes that have to be bridged or held to create a safe container 'The space is both hospitable and charged': OK – I create an hospitable space; number one being that it is beautiful and number two – we teach people what they need to be able to engage with the horses safely, including an environment of no judgement – and at the same time I am asking people to do things that are charged…. it's bounded – we're having a conversation about attention; it's open to what you as a learner need to learn about attention."*

This links with a number of ideas about the 'holding' or safe space being one where risks can be taken and the outcomes seen as learning not 'failing'. Both P6 and P3 have also mentioned something about the beauty of the place, contributing to clients feeling welcome and safe. So there is a sense in which the whole environment is part of that psychological container. The last point, about the activities themselves as being emotionally charged, is a fascinating one. P7 uses different language, but makes a similar point. I.e. that by simply working in a more embodied way, often in an unfamiliar environment, with horses, emotions may be more present than they otherwise would be. It seems that the nature of the work is charged, so the need to be particular about creating a safe space or container up front is vital.

P7 mentions a number of different things that contribute to the felt sense of safety, that are perhaps more specific to working with horses. So the physical, knowing how to keep oneself safe becomes part of the psychological safety. In that respect the clients have some small things to pay attention to that may contribute to feeling more comfortable and less uncertain. Often, working with horses is part of a wider leadership development programme and some somatic practices are given prior to working with the horses.

However, P7 talks about the contrast between when facilitating in a normal, classroom environment and working with horses. In a classroom there are often familiar structures and expectations and the facilitator can make a choice about how deep to take a learning situation based on a number of factors. P2 also creates deliberate, familiar classroom like structures to 'pace' expectations. However, that choice is not always there when working with horses.

P7page 6 *" (in a classroom) it is almost like the familiarity creates a bit of safety, which enables the deepness to be picked up on or not picked up on depending on what's the contract with the group and what stage are we at etc…. Whereas with the horses – there isn't the familiarity and it can go deep within seconds – and you've really got to be on your metal the whole time."*

Page 7 "*physically, working on 'how do you centre yourself?' and 'how do you get in touch with your body and your breath?'…. I will often start people in the yard with a horse up close and personal and just get them to centre themselves. So there is a sense that they have something to go back to, but it' a personal container within that context".*

This seems to illustrate that being prepared and able to work with what comes up is key and why being present in the moment with no preconceptions is important. This might be about contracting up front with the group and agreeing how they want to be if something emotional is triggered. But part of the safety is created by the confidence and competence of the facilitator to hold a space for emotions to be processed if they do arise. This will be expanded on more later, however, an illustration of this might be useful.

*P6 page 10 "as she took the lead-line for the horse, she had tears streaming down her face and I said, "OK, tell me what has your attention right now?" and she says, "I'm worried that I am not going to be successful. I said, "OK. I'm going to ask you to trust the process for me for a few minutes….I want you to look at my horse's mane - and look carefully at her mane and describe the different colours…..Now tell me what you are feeling right now." …. Where did you put your attention?" She said, "On her!"….. and all I did was move her attention! I did not ask her about her history of failure. So, I kept the container…"*

Creating the conditions in which a client feels safe enough to take the risks needed for their growth and learning is an essential part of a facilitators role. There are many factors to be taken into consideration, and different ways to create that safe enough space. What all the participants expressed in some way, was the consideration and care taken to ensure that they held the space safely.

### Intervening

*observation, feedback, raise awareness, experiment*

This topic will be picked up in The Practice of Facilitation superordinate theme in terms of its more practical elements. However, the way that each of the participants has described their thinking in this area is pertinent. There are similarities and consistencies, but there are also some interesting differences too. This section will try to explore what those similarities are and whether they are coming from similar thinking. The differences will also be explored to see if they are genuine differences or simply expressed differently. To start with a couple of descriptions that give a flavour of the territory we are covering:

*P5 page 10 "…it is about letting be what will be, and then using that – so it feels very easy – but it is not…just be there and watch what happens and help them to watch what happens – rather than do anything. You don't need to do anything."*

*P5 page 13 "It might be literally just moving from where I am standing…just moving forward and being next to [the client] and not speaking and that might be intervention enough."*

*P7 page 24/25 "I think there is that sense of 'holding [them] in' an experience….Sometimes it does feel like a sort of a dance, really;…."*

So what does it mean to the participants to intervene? Each participant had some variation on a theme of using clean language (Rees, 2010; Sullivan & Rees, 2008), i.e. using the client's own words; to offer observations about horse or human behaviour, perhaps with gentle inferences; or ask very open questions that helped draw the client's attention to what was happening in the here and now. Though the quotes above also indicate that to an extent, simply being there was an intervention. This takes us back to presence and the facilitator holding a space. Each participant seem to articulate similar reasons for the above, which were to keep the experience about the interaction with the horse, to raise awareness in the here and now, or to help keep the clients in touch with their bodies not in their heads. So, the simpler the better was the consensus.

One of the areas of difference was in terms of the degree to which the facilitator chose to intervene in the sense-making process. It appeared that those who had an NLP background had the explicit belief that each person had their own map of the world. Therefore, the sense making process had to be the client's own, and that any intervention on the part of the facilitator wouldn't be respecting that.

P1 page 15 *"I tend to be, on that spectrum, towards that I don't need to be helping them make sense of it if they can't make sense of it themselves. Because I think the danger of trying to make sense of it for them is that you do project…..I just feel if it comes out of their processing then it is their truth; if I try and make sense of it for them it is likely to be my stuff."*

In the above quote it appears, whilst a spectrum is referred to, there seems to be an assumption that there is not any middle ground between the client doing it for themselves or the facilitator doing it for them. The rationale of not wanting to project their own 'stuff' on to the client is a sound one. However, it does not give much room for a self-aware facilitator to notice their projections and to put them to one side, whilst still supporting the client to make the sense they need to. Those who had a more varied background in facilitating leadership development, perhaps had a more nuanced view of how far they could go in supporting the client, to make sense ***with*****,** not ***for***. It may also be that they have different perspectives on learning. This would influence the choices they make as a facilitator as a large part of their role is to help the client have a learning experience. The specifics of how this influences facilitators differently will be picked up in another superordinate theme, that of 'Theory of learning'

There was also some mention of, or acknowledging power, and not privileging the facilitator's voice too. Again, it appeared to be more explicit in those with an NLP background, that they thought of themselves as non-expert, that there was a sense of them being *with* the client, setting up an experience with a horse, from which they could learn. As P1 says *"We're a bunch of people together*

*to have an experience; I have some expertise hopefully around horses that will keep them safe and around this work that will set up experiences for them to get insight" page 16.* And P6 comes from a tradition of education which stems from changing the power dynamics of learning through dialogue. This means to put learners more central to their own learning, active participant's not passive or dependant on the educator. P7 comes from a similar place though from a UK, not US perspective, via Self-Managed-Learning principles.

*P4 page 29/30 "It tends to be on how hard I push and how much I leave them to draw their own conclusions, so it tends to be almost a case of intervention – how much am I saying? People who are operating at a lower level of self-awareness, then I will give them…. I do tend to help them a little bit more…."*

*P5 page 11 "when to intervene and I am much, much better at it now. The first temptation to intervene; the second temptation to intervene; the third temptation – maybe now, possibly? Maybe not? That ability to stand back and wait…. it is about making sense with them about what comes out of that rather than looking for it to be so called "successful".*

P7 page 28 *"it is that sense of the flexibility of, as a facilitator, how do I help you do what you can't yet do for yourself? And in the process – developing that ability to do it for yourself …"*

Different participants had a variety of strategies to manage the power dynamic, which was perhaps more about structure than intervention. Whilst P2 and P7 were both explicit about offering their feedback or observations to the client working with the horse, there were some important differences. P2's perspective was that if the group had picked something up then the facilitator did not need to say anything. However, it was seen as avoiding favouritism, i.e. if they added observations to one client and not to another. They also had the observing group offer observational feedback first then the client with the horse, this was to support diversity in perspectives. P7 also did not offer the same observation if an observer had picked up on it, but may add depth if it was important.

However, P7 specifically asked the client with the horse for their observations first before inviting the group. This was for two reasons; firstly that it maintained a focus on the learner and them taking ownership of their learning; secondly it was to avoid any observations being taken as tacit instructions or 'how to'. This was mentioned as a danger with some groups as they can get focused on the 'right way' to lead the horse. The focus for the feedback was also specifically about what they had noticed the horse doing, before anything they had noticed about the person, for the same reason.

Something that was common across all participants is that often an intervention would be a question designed to draw the client's attention to something. This was normally guided by what the horse had done, or not done. This was to raise awareness, seen often as a prerequisite to learning. Some illustrations of this:

*P1 Page 14 "What was going on for you at the moment that the horse started following you, or stopped following you?"*

*P3 page 22 "Just nudging people along with what's happening. 'I'm curious about, tell me more about, share with me something about…"*

*P4 page6/7 "just asking the questions that help the people interact with the horse so they can draw their own conclusions from it."*

Another category of intervention were those used to get the client to experiment or at least try something different. This was something else that was common across all participants and seems linked to theory of learning. Essentially, once the client had an experience with a horse and got some data, there was encouragement to do something different and see what response it got from the horse. There were differences in how far along a coaching spectrum they would go i.e. how directive or questioning they were in what to experiment with. However, even with those who said they may get directive at times, it was never prescriptive.

*P6 page 18/19 "so that greeting didn't work for her. What do you want to do about that?" …."Great. Let's watch and see what different result you get from her."*

*P4 Page 40 "we'll play with something different and see if we get a different reaction from the horses. I guess it's having that moment of insight"*

*P5 page 33 " it's about an iterative process of experiment, feedback and sense-making and doing something different and trying it all again"*

So as with P6, a number of the participants were flexible in how they supported the clients in their experimenting. As mentioned before, there are a number of factors that the participants seem to be holding in mind when they were choosing how, when or indeed if to intervene. This might be based on experience and intuition, or on specific things such as the need to maintain safety and the integrity of a session. Other factors will be explored further when we look in more detail at the practice of intervening.

## ATTENTION

*where facilitator's focus is, focus on the horse as data, as co-facilitator, focus on the body, drawing client's attention to things*.

What are you paying attention to? Whilst this may appear to be a simple question, there are a number of different facets to the answers. The key elements are: where the attention is and if there is an order to it; The role of self-awareness and facilitator intuitions; and how the facilitator draws the attention of the client or observers. It was a specific question asked of all participants and very similar things came out, but with different emphasis for different participants. To begin though, with the felt experience of what it is like to hold that attention. It was described by P3 as having a 'radar' on 3 ways, a scanning rather than a focusing:

*P3 page 13 "observing the horse and observing client, the things I'm looking for, oh and the third leg of the stool if you like, is my own personal tracking, my own body scanning, so my radar is on 3 ways."*

This was similar in some ways to P7 who described paying attention, but that it wasn't 'held' anywhere specific, rather it appeared to flow. *Page 12 "It's almost like I have got my attention in lots of different places but I'm not holding it – if that makes sense?"*

All participants mentioned some variation of their focus being on the horse, client, group and themselves. P4 gives a particularly full account of where their attention is:

*P4 page 10: "Four things. So firstly I'm paying attention to the person; so what's happening in their body language, how's their breathing - is it fast? Is it slow? Where are their eyes? What's their contact? ….Are their movements, body language, strong or tentative? What is that telling me about how they are showing up?....I am looking at the horse's reaction and therefore the interaction between them, so from that point of view are they reading the horse.... the third thing I am looking at is the group…. so part of my dual role is not just to facilitate the interaction with the horse and person but to engage the group in that as well… the fourth place my observations are is on the other horse and the other facilitator….So just from a health and safety perspective I've always got one eye on where the other horse is.* (when prompted about attention to self): *Page 12 "I'm paying attention to …. that I'm holding the space enough. That I am not jumping in too soon with my observations; making sure they are observations and not conclusions – so quite a lot of the time I'm paying attention to my own thought process…. is this the right time to speak? Is this the right thing to say? And just making sure that my energy is right as well."*

The differences appear to be the order or priority of attention i.e. for P1,2,3,5 and 7 the horse is explicitly the primary focus and source of data. Their facilitation is guided by what the horse does and so observation of micro-body language cues takes up a lot of their focus. Also, how that attention is focused on their own felt sense and a more intuitive experience of what seems relevant:

*P2 page 17 "It is almost like a spotlight will go on certain things, it is like something will catch your attention." Page 29 "Pay attention and be present. Be totally 100% present and pay attention to what… Part of my facilitation is I want to be a horse."*

*P3 page 14 "I'm tracking, scanning my own body….I trust that my body will resonate with what's happening between the client and the horse."*

*P7 page 10/11 "I'm using the breath a lot whilst I'm doing that so I can keep tuning in to what's happening with me and just keeping a really clear, strong focus on 'what is the horse doing?' and allowing myself to be guided by that….. Often, I will be allowing myself to connect with my own intuitions about 'oh, what's that about?' or 'what's the impression being created and is that my stuff?' "*

The subtle elements that are being illustrated here are around the connection between the facilitator's ability to pay attention to their felt sense and the horses; The degree of awareness needed to make sense of this data and check out whether these felt impressions and intuitions are projections; And the connection between attention and presence, and the strategies employed to stay in the moment enough to notice. This is a potential minefield for facilitators. P4 makes an

interesting point about the complexity of what the facilitator is paying attention to and the usefulness of having other facilitation experience to draw on:

P4 page 42/3 "*I think it is quite hard to come to EAL without having the facilitation first? …. it is a big leap to go from not doing it to doing it in that context. So doing it in a room is one thing…. but doing it all the ways we have described with the horse, with all the different dynamics going on being aware of your own process and being aware of theirs – it is a lot!"*

*And P6 page 25 "When I think about everything that has gone in building this, it almost seems, it seems very hard to reproduce. Because I'm able to explicitly articulate the bodies of knowledge that have influenced my practice, but those bodies have accumulated over decades. Not to mention the life I have spent with horses."*

P7 also makes an interesting point that draws on their experience as a facilitator, gained outside the EALD work. This is about the awareness of the emotional processes in learning and noticing if a client has had an emotional defence mechanism triggered:

*P7 page 39: "very much paying attention to whether it has triggered somebody's emotional defence mechanism. So, have they 'blocked' from making sense of it – and if that's the case then we might work with that so that they then have access to it."*

This makes the point about this not necessarily being something that novice facilitators should undertake lightly. The experience required to spot, hold safely and work productively with these defence mechanisms is substantial. It is also beholden on the facilitators to maintain their attention and being a safe presence for extended periods of time. All participants mentioned about the experience of working with horses as tiring, as well as being energising too. P5 and 7 also make the point that at times, the sheer breadth and depth of attention is difficult to maintain. *P5 page 27 "your attention is……occasionally it can feel a little bit stretched….".*

As with presence, attention is something that many of the facilitators will explicitly try to develop in their clients. In different ways, each of them talked about helping clients notice what was happening; in the horse, in themselves, in the colleague they were observing, or the environment. This is connected to presence and developing awareness in the moment, but for P6 in particular it is explicitly linked to a model of leadership.

*P5 page 14 "it would be about bringing their attention into what they have noticed about the horse and, quite often, what they have noticed about themselves as well."*

*P6 page 5 "developing your capacity to pay attention, particularly the ability to pay attention at three levels simultaneously – because those are all the sources of information you need to make good decisions when you are in the midst of uncertainty... So, you can imagine that as soon as I invite someone to step into a relationship with a horse, their ability to pay attention gets better really quickly!"*

This is where the ability to pay attention in the moment to a variety of sources of data is essential in navigating complexity and uncertainty. They also make the point that, just being around a horse has the tendency to increase a client's focus in the moment. This will be picked up in the discussion

around the need for risk or some form of heightened arousal and how that links to theories of learning. Also P7's theory of learning makes the connection between the stage of development or emotional maturity of the client's and what data they can pay attention to. This has potentially big implications for how to facilitate different stages. P4 has also mentioned adapting the style of facilitation with one factor being maturity or self-awareness.

So, as with presence, attention is a multifaceted concept. This ranges from what the facilitator is paying attention to and the complexities of holding that attention to how to support the client paying attention in the moment. The next cluster of themes has connections with attention, but is slightly more diverse in terms of what it is the facilitator is drawing on when they are working.

## Experience

*felt sense, intuition, tensions and choices, emergence – working with, adapting.*

Each of the participants had their own way of describing how the experience they had of facilitation, with or without horses, showed up for them. This ranged from noticing energetic shifts, or getting thoughts and intuitions, to balancing the many possible choices and going with what feels right at the time. This is a tricky one as will be discussed further; what is the difference between novice and expert intuition? Is it years of experience that enables subconscious pattern recognition? Would a novice's intuitions simply be guesses or products of biases or projections they weren't aware of? Or is it that experts have a much wider repertoire to draw on and can make subtle choices based on a large bank of experience? To what extent is supervision needed to check their assumptions and intuitions?

*P1 page 13 "I think it is just having your antennae out there, having your senses open to shifts in energy, that are always happening but are sometimes they're quite dramatic"*

*P2 page 15 "What I notice is things pop into my head and I feel things [in the body]…Often for me it is someone going…'boing' [in my head]*

*P3 page 22 "Or with someone else it may be that they need to feel more energy in their shoulders or they're locked up around the pelvis, or they're always off in their head, how do I get them back into their body."*

*P4 page 33 "So for me the facilitation skills are a constant battle between how hard you challenge, when you rescue, when you step back, when you just hold the space, when you let them reach their own learning as opposed to making them articulate their learning – it is those sort of dynamics that I'm working on all the time."*

Most of the participants said something similar, that what they were drawing on was a product of their experience i.e. that they were just working with what came up and adapting. This again links back to presence and being in the moment without preconceptions. This illustrates that there is considerable experience and confidence needed to see what emerges from the interaction between the horse and the person. P6 also makes the point that having a clear intent and solid structure enables the facilitation to flex with where the learner needs to go:

*P6 page 9 "I am very clear in my intent – and because that is true – I can go in with an activity in mind and then completely change it based on what is happening and hold the container…"*

What became increasingly clear from the second interviews was the range of things that a facilitator would draw on their experience for. All four second interviews mentioned some form of testing out assumptions or tentative hypotheses, which came from integrating numerous sources of data including their experience of developing other leaders:

P3 page 6 " *I might say something like is there something about what happens when you don't have control of the situation, or I wonder if there is something about recalibrating how you perceive needs…"*

P5 page 8 *"these little tentative hypotheses, 'I wonder if …' again it is not on that cognitive level, on that felt level…yes it is, its testing those out, that's how I work, they might say yes, or they might say no*."

Experience is what has shaped each facilitator's practice and as such is unique to each one. Not everyone needs to have the same experience, but it does appear that it is valued as a resource and used in different ways. This may be explored in more depth in the discussion and illuminated further through the second interview process.

### PURPOSE

This final section under the superordinate theme of Theory of Facilitation, was a specific question to encapsulate a key element of how each participant thought about their role. This ranged from helping clients connect with authentic self; discover their own wisdom and worth; having an experience with a horse that gives them feedback they can integrate. However, a common theme was about safety, whether this was physically or emotionally. Another comment which came up in a number of ways was to encourage participants to experiment and have a different, ideally embodied, experience.

*P2 page 48 "Open the door of possibility is the first thing that sprung into my head. That is the possibility of connecting with self and allowing yourself to do that and never at the cost of the horses….Keep it safe, actually the safety thing is implicit in that because I think if people don't feel safe they won't do it. Way more emotional safety than physical."*

*P4 page 40 "To enable people to gain insight from the experience - their own insight from the experience. So to build self-awareness and to help people identify what they want to hold on to and what they want to let go of….*

*P5 page 38 "To keep them safe, primarily and to help them to learn something from the experience – as simple as that, so whatever that means."*

*P6 page 4 "Well, when I think about my role as a facilitator, I am really clear that my job is to enhance people's skill and navigate them through uncertainty and complexity….the best way to learn something is to go straight to the source so whenever I partner a person with a horse, my goal is to create experiences that allow them to develop the same capabilities the horses have."*

This type of in depth, experiential learning has many different applications. These may be very pragmatic and flexible in terms of helping learners gain insight and get something of value to them. It might also be very specific, such as helping clients develop the capabilities a horse has to navigate complexity. Specific or flexible, each participant was clear for themselves what their purpose was. In

different ways, these link into the different practices of facilitation and the implicit theories of learning and will be covered in more detail in the next sections.


Figure 3: Mind Map Practice of Facilitation Superordinate theme and concepts

## PRACTICE OF FACILITATION

This superordinate theme looks at what each of the participants are doing, the choices they are making in the moment, when working with a group. The themes of structuring, observing, experimenting, supporting and challenging are technically all intervening but have been broken out to explore in more depth. Links back to the implicit and explicit theory of facilitation will be made and any challenges or contradictions explored. It is perhaps the most complex and multifaceted. I own that I am heavily influenced by the likes of Trevor Bentley and John Heron who both have particular ways of thinking about how a facilitator operates in practice. When reviewing the themes and concepts, some of their labels have provided a way of clustering the data. Neither Heron, nor Bentley's taxonomy is followed in full, rather an amalgamation has provided some useful labels. The pros and cons of this will be explored in more detail through the discussion, in Chapter five.

## STRUCTURE

*stages of the day, simplicity of task, primacy of the interaction with the horse, role of being directive, safety and in service of creating a different experience*.

Some of the participants were more explicit than others on how the structure of the day contributed to shaping the way they facilitated. For example P1, 2 and 3 mentioned starting the day with deliberate exercises to help the clients to physically arrive and get present. Whether they were explicit about the purpose or not. There was also mention of starting the day with the clients being asked to set their own learning outcomes. This links in with both the theory of facilitation in terms of being non-expert and the power dynamics; and theory of learning in that it is about what the client wants to learn, and them taking ownership and an active role.

*P1 page 6 "I'm very keen that people have outcomes that they are responsible for achieving because my job as a facilitator is to help them achieve their outcomes, not to teach them stuff…"*

*P2 page 9 "…at the highest level the first thing I want to get someone is present and grounded and we will do different things for different people."*

*P3 page 8 "…so we start off with people doing something that helps people be calm, help them to arrive…The task brief is observing horse behaviour, so we turn some horses loose in the arena and its observe them interacting in silence, just notice what you notice."*

This last point, about the task brief is something that came up across the participants, which was simplicity of the instructions. This links with another point which is about the primacy of the interaction with the horse. If the instructions are too complicated, or not clear enough this can get in the way of the client interacting with the horse, and it can become more about the doing of the task than the experience. Safety was another key reason why instructions were often simple; as mentioned in the theory of facilitation, most clients will have little or no experience of horses, so any task instructions would need to be simple to keep them physically safe.

*P4 page 9 "…you can't put too much around the task or what they're doing because what you are doing is narrowing things down for them, when the whole point is to open their thinking up."*

*P6 page 6 "So, one of the simplest first steps is that we teach people how to say hello to a horse…. We give you three options….and so our instruction to the participant is, "Notice which greeting the horse prefers." You're going to have to fumble around with it because you are not going to know; you have to notice, So you need to know where your body is to keep yourself safe…."*

The simple instructions could be seen as part of holding a safe space or creating a container. This was majored on in the section on theory of facilitation, but it is worth being reminded of what P6 said about a well-structured design *"…a well-structured design maximises your freedom in the moment because – just the simple frame of helping people to develop their capacity to pay attention – is really the only structure I need….I can go in with an activity in mind and then completely change it based on what is happening and hold the container." Page 9*

P7 comments that simple instructions are beneficial to the facilitator too, in that it creates more attentional capacity to observe and notice what is happening. This is partially about safety, but more

to do with clarity of focus. Both P7 and P1 talk about making sure that the facilitator gets the client working with the horse quickly.

P1 page 4 "*if you just get somebody interacting with a horse you will see stuff and they will learn stuff and if you give them something that doesn't seem the right thing – well change it."*

P7 page 10 *"I think that one of the things that helps me to do that is to have very, very simple structures that I actually don't change that much because for me it is 'how do you get somebody interacting with a horse?'*

The purpose of the structures described is to get the clients interacting with a horse so that they can observe what happens. This is the highly experiential nature of this work. A common mistake is for novice facilitators to get too focused on the exercise, or to get involved in talking too much. P1 illustrates this well:

*P1 page 28/9 "….they have to learn to stop coaching; they have to stop thinking about the next question… otherwise you end up with a coaching session with a horse watching thinking 'do you need me today?'…. give the person something to do and then you will see the relationship, you will see what's happening, you will get feedback."*

As this is experiential learning, the structure evolves over the course of the day and has different purposes accordingly. As mentioned above, the initial structure is designed to settle the clients, help them become more present, and then get them interacting with a horse. This enables the facilitator to observe the horse's response to the client. I will come back to observation in the next section.

Each of the participants described various ways their structures shifted. P3 in particular has a structure that works with six aspects that build on each other; from becoming more present, to working with emotions as information and understanding how to muster and direct energy. P6's structure is multi-layered in that it develops specific capabilities as well as following (adapted) classic experiential learning principles. However, all participants describe an iterative experiential cycle of interacting, getting feedback, changing something and seeing what difference it makes to the horse. Depending on the length of the session, this may be worked through once, or a number of times.

There were any number of different ways of the facilitators helping clients to do something different so that they could see the impact on the horse. This was sometimes described as being directive, even though it was often couched in terms that were perhaps more encouraging experimentation, or 'try this and see what happens'. It was clear that, being directive came at specific points, and definitely not when sense-making. It was more likely to be in a phase of the cycle where the feedback from the horse had indicated that there was an unhelpful pattern, or the client was stuck in some way.

Something that came out of the second interviews is whether the size of the group needs to consciously change the structure or not. This was something that was not specifically asked about and so data from some other participants is not known. However it is worth raising as it has practical, safety implications, but also what might be possible in terms of depth of learning. This is another tension that the facilitator needs to hold consciously.

*P2 page 22/23 "Let's just try something different. What would happen if you walked over there and you held onto the end of the rope? Let's have a contrastive analysis….."*

*P3 page 22 "Just nudging people along with what's happening.....I'm leading people to draw their own conclusions. I'm working really hard to make sense of what I see and feel in order to guide the session…. So with this guy, I've got all these clues, but what I really know is that he really needs to feel his feet on the ground….how do I get them back into their body."*

*P7 page 13/14 "I can get a little bit more directive around that kind of thing because I can see what's happening, and what might be getting in the way, but it is always that "Well try it and see what happens" and I might get it wrong. …this a core principle for me…I don't care how you make sense of it but have a different experience so your body knows what it feels like."*

So structure, whilst it may appear to be simple, it is used deliberately and skilfully. It is used to support the client in their interaction with the horse, to experience something different and to stay safe.

### OBSERVING

*Horse, human, energy and unhelpful patterns, drawing attention to, drawing out of observations, observing group engagement*

All of the participants talked a good deal about observation, but from a number of different angles. In theory of facilitation, observation was covered under attention. This is where the facilitator is focusing at any given moment. The primary focus of that was on gathering information, and so in practice, it is the act of observing. There were some examples of very detailed observation of both horse and human, the real minutiae of body language. There was also attention given to hearing what the client said about their context, culture etc, their emotional climate, as well as what wasn't said, and what the client did. P7, in the second interview mentioned that with so much data to be paying attention to, the horse was an anchor to return to.

*"… it is getting really good at switching between the different sources of data – and that's why I think it is often very useful to keep the horse as the anchor to that. I can't really go far wrong if I pay attention to what the horse is doing – and that usually leads me to look somewhere else for another piece of data or to notice what I notice in the other sources"p22*

However, the main point of the observing was to give those observations as an intervention. The way these observations were given was most often described as 'clean' but also 'non-judgemental' and 'simple'.

Some participants differed in terms of the balance of feedback from what the horse was doing and being explicit about that and giving feedback about what they observed the client was doing. On the whole, most participants worked with what the horse was doing primarily, and connected it to client behaviour e.g. P5 page 14 *"…I notice that when you released your breath the horse stopped licking and chewing and turned towards you….."* though some were less explicit in verbalising this.

P3 page13 *"It's a combination of observing the horse and observing client, the things I'm looking for, oh and the third leg of the stool if you like, is my own personal tracking, my own body scanning, so my radar is on 3 ways"*

*P4 page 7 "…using all my skills as an observer psychologist and really tuning in to the minutiae of what is happening in the interaction and being able to pick up on that one or two key bits as people interact with the horse"*

And as intervention:

*P1 page 13 "I think it is in the way you make the observation a question. If you say "Well I noticed….? Or what happened there? What was going on for you at the moment that the horse started following you, or stopped following you?" So I'm not telling them what I'm thinking, because I don't know! Something's shifted…"*

*P2 Page 20 "Whatever it is. If I can I will just say it as an observation"*

All of the participants described engaging the other members of the groups as active observers. This was partly to keep them engaged, but also because they were often just as good at spotting what was happening as the facilitators. The act of observing was also seen as part of the learning experience by some i.e. vicarious learning and noticing more about others as a way to prime their self-awareness. However, they may need some support to observe in a non-judgemental, or 'clean' way. The skill of giving good observational feedback was sometimes mentioned as useful in its own right. So, clients learning from observing as well as learning how to observe.

*P2 page 10 "they notice what is happening or someone in the group will feedback and say, "I noticed this happen when this happens." Of course, the horse is doing stuff which is way more relevant than what the people say. To me these are the patterns you are running"*

*P7 page 10 "I will often observe what I'm seeing out loud to the group that is watching; so saying 'I'm noticing what's going on with the horse's pace, what's happening with their ears, if there is any tension, how high is their head carriage' that kind of stuff so that… the intent is to help people tune into, 'when you are observing – what are you seeing?' so they're also my eyes on that."*

Observing minutely, the giving of observations to raise awareness and the drawing out of good quality observations from the other clients is a multifaceted practice or skillset. It has active and passive elements. And whilst the facilitator does not always need to be the one offering the observations, they still need to be paying attention so that they can if the group has missed something, or are not able to offer it without judgement. It is worth noting that all participants were experienced with horses, and are therefore more likely to be able to spot more subtle body language than the clients as relative novices. However, that does not mean to say that what they spot is any less relevant.

### SUPPORTING

*encouraging, using emotions as data, safety – holding space and working with healthy expressions of emotions, play, sense-making, relevance, practical, summary and teaching points, making invisible*

*visible. Practical application – get something useful, relevant, strategies and skills that can be practiced.*

This cluster too seems to have both active and passive elements, or elements that can be expressed passively or actively. This was described as encouraging clients in a number of ways. It may be that the client is encouraged to notice for themselves either an internal state or an external impact. The art of asking very simple, open questions was the behaviour most often referred to. These seemingly simple questions support the client to notice and reflect.

*P3 Page 15 "the horse's response to the client is generally what guides me as to when I should make an intervention. And it will always be that kind of very, very open, non-judgmental, just 'I wonder what's happening?'"*

*P4 Page 17 ""So what happened? What went on for you there?" And normally that will then draw out for them to reflect on "Well, what did happen?""*

There are slightly more active versions of this type of question in that the facilitator may give an observation first, or link a horse behaviour with an inquiry. The choice to add in an observation or not, may be based on when in the programme, or the levels of awareness of the client. This links back to the theory of facilitation and the facilitator only doing for the client what they can't yet do for themselves. The facilitator draws the attention of either the client or the observing group to something that seems relevant. The choice of what is relevant requires discernment and enough self-awareness to ensure that it is not the facilitator's biases or projections.

*P1 page22 "the kind of stuff we are talking about here tends to be more personal, which as you know, will get triggered but it's not necessarily the time or the place to do it….. it's being there for the person and just keeping yourself completely out of it."*

*P3 page 19 "I do a bit of body scan, talk to the group about body scan. Ask what's happening in your body now?"*

*P3 page 24"This is about experiencing the feeling, naming the emotion, or issue. There's then a discharge, 'I get it' or the body says 'I get' or emotional release of some sort."*

Support may be needed to encourage the use of emotions as information and to precipitate a release. This may be by using a practical technique to get access to that information. Or it may be back to the presence of the facilitator, to simply be and hold a safe space whilst a client deals with an emotional experience. P5 particularly notes the need to by compassionate when emotions are triggered.

P3 describe gently re-contracting with a client who has been triggered by an activity. The subtle balance being struck between maintaining the integrity of the session and its intent, with empathy and sensitivity.

P3, 2nd Interview p13 "…if a leadership client is suddenly really teared up I might ask them what was happening for them…. I might say, that feels really painful, thank you for sharing that with me. Then pause, let them have their tears, give them a tissue then imagine giving them a hug, an

energetic hug. Then 'I'd like to check in with you, we were talking about your relationship with the chief exec, I want to check in with you where we take the session"

Whilst this may seem like the experience can be a challenging one, both P4 and P5 talked about supporting the learning with play. This was used by others as well to mean to experiment, changing something and seeing the impact on the horse. However this was more specifically about changing the energy, helping clients tap into a lighter, more playful way of being.

P5 page20/1 *"sometimes ….it can all feel quite intense for people and injecting….I mean the horses will inject playfulness into it –but sometimes there is that need to change that reflective thing into it is about being playful; it is about having fun with this. Its not all about soul searching and emotional moments…"*

So, part of supporting a client may be some deep work, it can equally be about enabling a more creative approach. However, again, self-awareness is needed as a facilitator to ensure that changing the energy is done in service of the learning rather than out of personal discomfort.

One area where there was consensus on a more passive approach to supporting the client was when it came to sense-making. This links with the ideas around intervention in the theory of facilitation and theory of learning covered later. Quite often participants would say that clients would be able to make sense of what they had experienced for themselves. This ranged from recognition of an emotion and the meaning it had; similarly patterns of behaviour and understanding of where they came from. The examples below are just a sample of stories given.

*P2 page20/1 "If you were to play with [this] what would you do?" She said, "I would walk the horse down there and back again." Interestingly she grabbed the rope much further down, went out in front of the horse and came back. As she came back she said, "That thing is about control you know….I didn't think it was, but the reason I knew it was is because when I held the rope long….I felt out of control."*

*P3 page 21 "I went to him to debrief out of earshot of the group and of course, he made all the links himself. I didn't have to say anything, he realised that it was at the root of all his problems. 'I just work so hard to be liked'"*

However, it was more varied when asked what they did if a client was struggling to make sense for themselves in this way. Some participants would just leave it and trust that the client would make sense on their own, but not necessarily there and then. It may well be that the meaning for them may only become apparent days, weeks or even months later. P2 raises a potential issue with this in the second interview in that leaving clients being stuck: p8 "*what they're actually learning is that I'm shit! I came here because I've got a problem and do you know I'm right, I have*".

Most participants would provide more active support in helping the client make sense, often by drawing their attention to something like a pattern of behaviour they may have spotted and perhaps connecting that to a horse behaviour. Then they would draw out connections or a sense of something being familiar by using open questions, but as P5 said: "*if they were very, very stuck".* As mentioned before, that has to do with what the client can do for themselves and making that judgement call as a facilitator.

However, in the second interview P5 was able to give a more detailed account of actually what is going on when supporting a client to make sense of an experience. This has some resonance for theory of learning as the emphasis here is to work on a somatic level first. P7 also emphasizes this.

P5 page 5 *"I'm kind of trying to nudge the client to connect with things somatically that I feel, and that's just feeling, and I suppose some of it is also knowledge based that might be relevant because that's where the change would occur. So, if it's about awareness and when I feel things are shifting either by observing the horse's behaviour towards the client, the client's own behaviour or being in tune with my own somatic and emotional reactions. When I feel there's a shift I then draw their awareness, I try to put the shift into their consciousness and I'll start at a somatic level."*

Four out of the seven participants particularly emphasised another area of support which was about making sure clients got the relevance to their work. This was seen partly as ensuring that the client got value for money, and fulfilling the implicit contract of the work being about leadership development. This might be helping clients think through where the new behaviours would be useful, or what habits and practices they might need to develop to keep embodying the leadership qualities they had discovered. However, in its strongest incarnation it was being a student of organisational life and being passionate about understanding the client's business.

*P4 page 41/2 ""Just take a moment. Think about it. Capture whatever the moment was for you, in your mind, today and hold onto that feeling – because that's what really great leadership feels like……I do feel quite strongly about this – it is more than just facilitating the learning in the arena with the horses – it is how you wrap that experience up to be meaningful to the person and the business context. ….how you are drawing on all the other theories….in order to make this experience relevant to people – because without that relevance, it is just playing with the horses."*

*P6 page 22 "..we studied the focus of their strategy, which is sustainability and all of the layers of meaning underneath that and made sure that every member of my team understood what their strategic challenges are and how to relate the diamond model as a way to become the kind of leader who makes an organisation sustainable."*

*P7 page 38 "…The sense-making is, in the first instance, noticing it in the body: how does it feel, what's it remind them of, where does it sit, is that familiar?…establishing it as an experience in their bodies, and in their previous experience…. the transfer of learning…. often it is about them as a leader…. but it is more a carrying it forward. So, "Where do you think this might be useful for you? If you approach these kinds of meetings from this place, how would that be different?" For some people, you might go into it in a little more depth because it might trigger some things for them in terms of some assumptions they have about what's their role as a leader…"*

Another area that was mentioned explicitly by all participants was the support given to the observing group. This might be directing their attention to what the horse and human were doing or asking questions to support those observations. As P4 remarked, some groups may find paying attention more of a challenge than others!

One final element of support offers an insight into the subtle ways that a facilitator can offer support. In this short extract, P6 demonstrates a number of skills that can provide active support. That is not to say that others weren't using this skills, just that this is a concise anecdote that demonstrates them well.

*P6 page 7 " the participant chose the one stroke down the forehead and the horse is like "Huh-huh – I don't like that!" and they're like, "She doesn't like me!" Oh, OK, so let's start there: you have a story in your head that this horse has opinions – there might be a different explanation. So – good that you are noticing that your greeting isn't working for her – what are your other options? Which one do you want to try? ….Then of course there is the conversation: this is the power of using your attention to make course corrections."*

In this example, P6 notices and reframes a potentially unhelpful story from the horse 'not liking' to her 'having opinions', with a gentle challenge to consider other explanations. P6 also then explicitly values the client for noticing something about her actions. Then moves into opening up options and keeps the choice with the client. The final point is an opportunity to make sense of the interaction in a bigger context. This last point may be getting close to sense-making for, but done skilfully and after the client has made sense of her personal experience, it can help to connect the learning back to the intent of the session, e.g. leading in complexity.

Supportive behaviours from the facilitator can be active or passive; from actively helping the client to see the connections between behaviours and impact on the horse to passively offering a safe presence when emotions are being experienced. The choice is sometimes based on perspectives the facilitator has on their role and how client's learn, but more often than not it is based on a careful assessment of what the client needs to help them make sense of the experience.

### CONFRONTING/CHALLENGE

*feedback, patterns*

This area was described in a number of different ways; from taking people out of their comfort zone to making a switch from doing to being as a challenge, or activities being emotionally charged. One side of this is the facilitator holding a space or container so that if /when the experience does become challenging in some way the client can experience what they need to safely. P6 and 7 make the point that the experience of being with a horse is often charged for many clients. This may simply be that they are confronted with a fear of horses that they did not know was there, or it brings up other issues such as fear of failure, loss of control etc. when they are asked to work with 'half a ton of flight animal' as P1 aptly puts it. Two of the participants describe observation and feedback from being with the horse as 'holding up a mirror' to the habits and patterns that the client was running. In and of itself, this may be confronting or emotionally charged. This implies that the act of helping the client 'see' what's in the mirror is enough.

*P1 page 28 "The whole point of this work is that, interacting with the horse, people see reflected back to them patterns that they are running which are based on their perception of reality…. it's a useful mirror on something that they want to do something about."*

*P7 page 27 " I think the whole experience is very confronting so you don't need to do that much with it other than pointing out the mirror that is the horse."*

However, it may be that some clients get particularly stuck and need more active challenging. This takes skill and judgement to get the balance right and move the learning on. Two examples are given

of when a client was stuck and how the facilitator intervened to shift their experience and help them gain insight. The first illustrates the use of observation and question, the second illustrates the use of humour and inference.

*P3 page 26 "I just said very gently, taking everything out of my voice, 'why would you like to do that, what's that about?' 'I just want to see if he will come with me to find my dream.' I just said, 'he's come with you anyway, he's with you, what more is there?' At that point he (the horse) yawned and rolled his eyes and started licking and chewing. And of course she burst in to tears and just buried her face in his mane and that was it."*

*P5 page 19/20 "but I just laughed and said – I can't believe what you are doing; you are now creating anxiety about this clip! It sounds like you need something to be worried about….but I did it in quite a humorous way. And that was just quite a moment for her and she said "I do this all the time!" I was quite direct – but I couldn't help it and it was all quite a fun moment."*

In the first example, P3 mentions that they had a strong internal reaction to the client's request to see if the horse would come with her. With heightened self-awareness and self-management, P6 was still able to make the observation and question gentle. This helped to make the space safe for the client, but was enough to catalyse a moment of insight and release. Similarly P5 talked about noticing a pattern with the client that transferred from one activity with the horse to the next. This challenge was directed at the behaviour of the client. This may have been a risky strategy, but it was couched in terms of 'it sounds like…' so an inference, not an interpretation or a judgement. Others talked about increasing how hard they pushed groups to explore themselves and go to an uncomfortable place. The role of risk and pushing client's outside of their comfort zones will be explored further in the theory of learning and the discussion.

P2 in this second interview talks about the timing of challenge and whether there is permission to challenge. They are also talk about a question that checks out an assumption a client might be holding as a gentle way of challenging p9 *"sometimes I'll ask, 'how often do you ask for help?'"*

So, whilst not a big part of what participants described as part of their practice of facilitation, the ability to challenge actively when needed is a useful skillset to have.

### Experimenting

However, what was mentioned explicitly by all the participants is the different ways they helped the client's to experiment with doing things differently. There were some different approaches in offering practical strategies, or take away practices, but the aim was to help the client have an experience of difference. On the whole most facilitators seemed to have a large toolkit of practical things they could offer to clients to help them change something. Whether these were NLP tools to help change state, mindfulness practices, or somatic exercises such as body scanning, breath techniques or centring. Again the choice whether to offer these were based on the levels of awareness and learning maturity. If the client was more self-aware then the approach was mostly to ask questions to help them decide what to change. If they were less aware then the facilitator either gave them options, or choose a technique to share with them. By the time the client is experimenting with doing something different, then it is less about how they get that experience and more important that they do experience something different.

This will be picked up more in the Theory of Learning but an extract from P7's second interview might be useful here:

*P15/16 " in order for him to get a different experience from what he is used to – at this stage I have to be quite directive with them because they are not going to work it out on their own – not in the amount of time that we have got….it's partly about keeping them safe, physically safe …. It's my educated guess about what it is that needs to be different….'let's just take the rope off and see what happens.'*

*[it is ]….hierarchical structuring', which can be incredibly useful but that doesn't necessarily move into hierarchical meaning-making or valuing or feeling or whatever …the directive-ness is there but it's done very deliberately and then let go of in order to create enough space. So in some ways, the directive structuring is like a container within which the experience is happening….I sometimes think of it as "What do I need to do to scaffold that experience for you?"*

## SELF- AS INSTRUMENT

*self-awareness and self- management, self as instrument – on the day and long term*

As described in the section above on challenge, the self-awareness and self-management needed by facilitators is sophisticated. This is not something that happens overnight, it is developed and actively maintained. Interestingly, four out of seven do EALD full time, whereas three practice skills in other leadership development contexts. However, of those who do EALD full time, there was either a long history of leadership development in other contexts, or an established executive coaching practice.

Most of the participants had various ways to maintain their energy and attention during the sessions with the horses. This ranged from attending to their own physical needs and having the support of other facilitators, both practically and to debrief with if anything came up. Many also mentioned having various regular practices that allowed them to care for themselves physically and emotionally. This might be the caring for their own horses or other animals to managing mental energy.

*P6 page 23 ". I cat-nap! I am really good at that – I know how to rest my mind. Literally – when I say cat-nap – there is a cat involved – I have seven cats and that literally can almost sedate me."*

This may sound trite, but the regular, ongoing practice of attending to and managing oneself is part of what might be termed 'self-as-instrument'. This concept will be returned to in the discussion and expanded upon. However, each participant described paying attention and managing their needs, which is an element of emotional intelligence. If they are practicing noticing regularly, the act of noticing when they are facilitating becomes second nature. They are also more likely to be able to know what is normal for them and what is their 'stuff' and what is the client's. Most of them also described having either a regular reflective practice whether that be journaling, peer or professional supervision. A number also mentioned meditation and other spiritual practices to support their well-being and their clarity of focus and intent.

Whilst not universal, a number of participants also commented on having ongoing personal and professional development.

P3 page 31 *"I do CPD things, I'm a member of a networking group that meets once a month, that's mainly coaches….I'm also a member down at Exeter for centre for leadership studies. That's hugely helpful, they run CPD days 4 times a year. They are quite alternative, people doing different things. A mixture of academics and practitioners….I advance my own horsemanship; I think that's important for the work."*

P4 page 5 "*I do continuing professional development as a Chartered Psychologist anyway but it means I facilitate in different contexts, it means I'm being exposed to different organisations, the problems, the challenges the risk, the market that they're working in, all of which crystalize my thinking in terms of how I help other people to become better leaders. It's not enough to be able to say – well, leaders need to be like this, come to me and I'll make you like this – you have to be able to understand the context that they are working in." and page 38 "I have supervision, so I am constantly working on myself, for me personally, as well – so it's always a journey"*

*P7 page 36 "we have coach supervision…I will often bring in some stuff with the horses or talk to ….whoever else I am co-facilitating with. So really keeping a track on my practice and what's happening for me – and actually, a lot of what I do that helps is meditation and making sure I can centre myself at a moment's notice. That's probably the biggest thing – practising what I preach in terms of managing myself."*

It seems that understanding and developing themselves regularly is something that helps the participants stay fit to practice. It also seems to display a humility, a learning mindset and a desire to take their practice seriously, in service of their clients.

One thing that came out of all the interviews, but was highlighted in some of the second interviews was the degree to which the participants were comfortable with ambiguity and not knowing. This was definitely a positive part of the facilitator's 'self-as-instrument' and presence. It seemed to support their ability to work with what emerged, and their willingness to accept that learning may be embodied even if it couldn't be articulated. However, what is worth considering is that whilst a facilitator might be comfortable with 'not knowing' and working emergently, not all clients would be. This is something that will be picked up more in Theory of Learning, but is a matter of pacing or making a judgement call. If clients are more used to traditional forms of leadership development, then the focus on the emergent and embodied may be refreshing or disconcerting.

## THEORY OF LEARNING

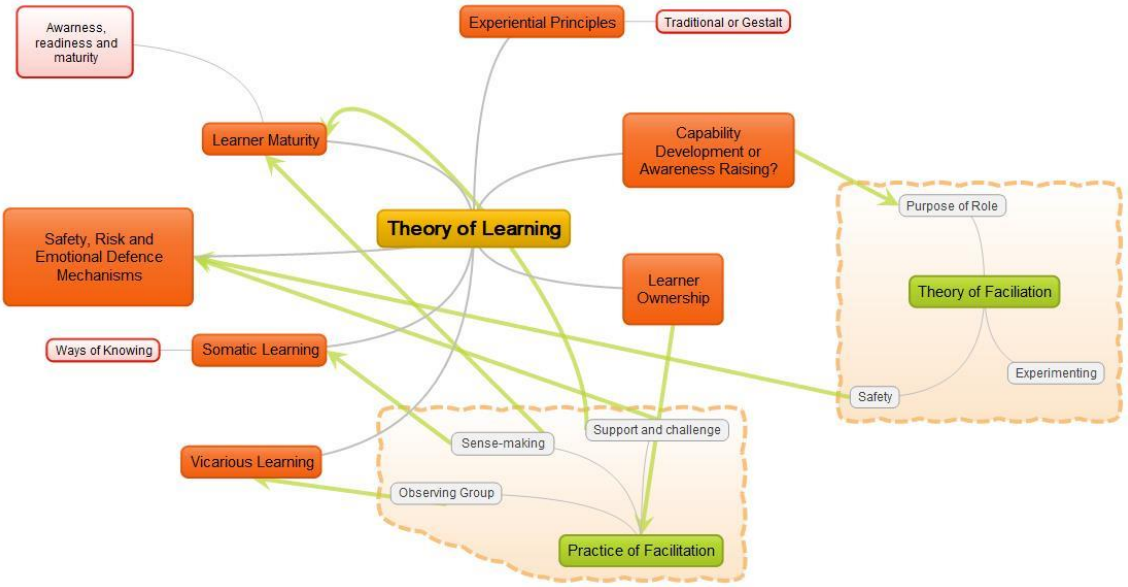



Figure 4: Mind map of Theory of Learning superordinate theme and concepts

This section looks at the implicit and explicit ways that the participants thought about the learning that their clients were undertaking. These ways of thinking about the process of learning influences what they do and do not do as a facilitator. These theories may shed some light on the different practical choices that were highlighted in the previous section. The theories of learning will also look at some wider points around where the practice of EAL sits in a leadership development programme and what implications that might have.

### PURPOSE OF LEARNING

*develop capabilities or raise awareness, connect to authentic self, embody leadership qualities, rediscover innate capabilities etc.*

One thing that was interesting to note was each of the participants had different overarching learning aims. These ranged from simply raising awareness or consciousness to remembering innate capabilities. These personal perspectives on learning gave an added insight into who these facilitators were and how they 'showed up'.

*P1 page 25 " We are here to help you work on the things you tell me you need to be effective; focus, energy, clarity, confidence, assertiveness, all of those things that you tell me; the horse will present questions to you on those things."*

*P2 page 49 " I think what is most important and I have said it but I will say it again. I have got a very clear intention…. I want people to understand that they are amazing…"*

*P3 page 29 "It's, all felt, it's all that embodied influence, who you are, about spirit, energy, how you show up, what holds you back? where are your…. all the shades of emotionality? what are your fears? how can you be present in the world and be yourself?*

What came out of two of the second interviews was that whilst, in practice most of the participants would use a mixture of both, they did require subtly different facilitation styles. P2 characterised the difference as being between a development experience and a learning one. With the development experience being more explicitly about connecting to a felt sense and authenticity, whereas a learning experience had more focus on leadership with horses as inspiration. Whether consciously or not, the more developmental experience was facilitated in a more coaching, exploratory style. Whereas the learning experience was facilitated with more teaching points and feedback. P2 was also the only participant who had a contrast between a one to one session and a group session. So time and the need to balance group with individual learning as well as client expectations may have had a bearing on it.

P6 also has an explicit way of thinking about learning which is shaped by a background in adult education. There was a specific intent, as mentioned before, to teach or remind clients of the capabilities needed to lead in complexity, but using the horses as role models. This is much more explicitly a learning/teaching agenda. However, the pedagogy or philosophy of education is one of equality and treating the learner with respect and as an equal partner. This ethos, of respect and treating the learners as adults and equal partners was present for all participants. P5 also linked this to the mindset of 'non-expert'. 2nd Interview, *p15 "There is a whole load of richness that doesn't just come from us, it's from everyone who's involved."*

In contrast P3,5 and 7 reported that, when working with groups, they kept the ratio of facilitator to client at one to four to maintain the individual attention. More generally, they and P1 and 4 had the intent of raising awareness as core to their theory of learning. This has implications for group size and facilitator to client ratios. It may not be possible to raise awareness to the degree needed for learning if the facilitator has over a certain number of people to work with. However, a more teaching/learning experience make work better for bigger numbers. This will link with the principles of experiential learning, which we will come on to shortly. The style of facilitation when the intent was to raise awareness was more emergent and free flowing.

This connects with a minor theme, that of a theory of leadership. Whilst not central to this research as such, it was noted that there were a number of different takes on leadership that might be worth exploring. One end of the scale was a direct focus on leadership behaviours with horses as the inspiration. This ranged from having a particular focus on leading in complexity and developing those capabilities by working with horses as role models, or relating horse behaviours with human leadership activities such as direction, destination and pace with vision, mission and strategy. This has a number of implications, for example the agenda is, to a degree, already set before the clients arrive. There is freedom to explore, but only within those boundaries. This is not unusual or problematic, but does mean certain choices are made without the individual clients' input. It also means that there will be a tacit success or failure if those particular ideas or skills are taken on board by the clients or not.

The other end of the scale was more about what qualities did the leader need to embody to display their authentic leadership, or simply developing the capabilities of emotional intelligence in an embodied way as the underpinning to all leadership. There is a looser agenda here, and P1 and 4 made the point that you can use horses as an experiential way of illustrating most leadership concepts. There is more individual choice here and more confidence needed by the facilitator to flex the design of the experience to meet each of the individual learning needs.

In practice, often both of these approaches were used by the same participants but perhaps with a different emphasis. Neither is right or wrong, but the fact that there are either implicit or explicit

models of leadership held by the facilitators needs to be taken into account. Otherwise, they may be influencing the choices being made unconsciously.

Neither way of thinking about learning is better or worse, however it does have an influence on how that learning may be facilitated.

## SOMATIC AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

*Insight can only be self-generated vs facilitator supports -. Learner maturity and independence, vicarious learning from observing*

Where that takes us is to the either explicit or implicit use of some form of experiential learning cycle and the different stages that it may contain. P6 explicitly references Kolb's learning cycle and has adapted it to maintain physical safety. i.e. the first experience is a safety demonstration. So whilst technically input or content, it is still an experience.

P6 page 14 *"I don't use Kolb's traditional model of experiential learning; I have adapted it to fit everything else that I understand to be true about context and about the role of content. So, Kolb will tell you – start with an experience and if you look at our simple model, generic model of an experience, which is "content, process, debrief, application" – Kolb will never tell you start with content and my belief is that content actually is an experience."*

Two other participants describe the stages of learning in a way that is similar to Kolb's traditional cycle, but with some crucial differences. When describing the early stages of the work with clients, it is common for participants to describe activities which get the client's interacting with a horse fairly quickly and getting some observations or an opportunity to reflect on that experience. What is also common to all participants is an active experimentation phase. However, the departure from traditional experiential learning is there is relatively little abstract conceptualising or theorizing for most participants. In fact a number of participant's talk about the dangers of conceptualising.

*P1 page 24 "I think the problem with experiential learning there is still far too much human intervention; let's sail a boat, cook a meal and talk about what happened. The thing about the horses is they don't talk to you, it's just experience and we try and keep our contributions to a minimum…"*

*P6 page 4 "…, I began to realise that it remains abstract until you have to do it. I have, of course always been a proponent of adult learning and experiential learning principles and I found that the fastest way for me to give people a chance to embody something as abstract as being adaptive. There was no faster way – no more effective way to teach the skills than to put them with the beings who truly understand it…go straight to the source, which is the horse!"*

*P7 page 19 "…the main thing: helping people stay connected physically with what's happening. What are they noticing in themselves? What are they noticing in the horse? Do they recognise what's going on without it going too much back in their heads?*

However, one exception was P6 who mentioned teaching points and would sometimes put the client's little stories in to the context of some relevant aspect of theory, or the 'bigger stories'. The impression created was this was done in a light touch way and followed the principles of adult

education that formed P6's background. This may also be why when dealing with a bigger group, P2's emphasis shifts from primarily awareness raising to a more 'learning about' approach. This is not to say that others may not do something similar, but it wasn't overtly mentioned.

An experienced and skilful facilitator can add small bits of theory in to support the learning. Whilst the point of working with horses is to have an experience, you are still working with language and it may be that some simple ideas are a useful way to help the client cognitively grasp the situation as well as somatically. This is a point that P7 mentions in the second interview: p5 "*it can be really difficult to put any language around it – and sometimes that's fine and other times it's not and you've got to pace where people's…. So you've got to work out – if you have got someone who is quite intellectual they will probably get quite frustrated if they can't find a language for the experience."*

There are subtle differences in the way that some other participants described the phases of learning. In particular P2, 3 and 4 talk about needing to start with awareness, without that foundation then learning can't proceed. Whilst similar to the observation and reflection phase there seems to be a slightly more active role for the facilitator in supporting the awareness to be made; it does not always automatically happen on its own. This seems to be a clear philosophical difference: either insight is spontaneous and does not need the facilitator's intervention, or it *can* happen spontaneously, but more often than not the facilitator needs to support it in some way.

Those participants who seem to be coming from the perspective that support is likely to be needed, then describe various other things that link to a more 'Gestalt' learning cycle. For example they talk about exploring what choices the client has, what they might want to do with the awareness they have. Then there is the active experimentation phase. Whilst not hugely different to the traditional model, ***if*** the theory of learning is more Gestalt inspired, then the facilitator can be more active, particularly in the exploring choices phase. Whereas traditional experiential learning does not necessarily need a facilitator, the Gestalt model actively uses the facilitators own awareness and experience to support the learner. This is not a doing for, but is perhaps more akin to the ideas of 'scaffolding' and the zone of proximal development which will be explored further in the discussion.

Other manifestations of this philosophical difference is in the degree to which the facilitator needs to support the transfer of learning. There was nothing in any of the participants' transcripts which indicated that the clients were treated as anything other than capable adults. This connects back to the awareness of how power dynamics might play out as discussed under the theory of facilitation. However, there was some difference when it came to the application of the insights gained. One perspective was that essentially, as grownups, the client can work out what to do with the insights generated by the experience. However, this may also be influenced by what else went around the work with the horses. For the most part, the EAL was part of a longer programme with the other elements being run by other providers. Only P7 seemed to work with groups before and after the experiential element with the horses. So the support for the practical application may well be coming, just not as part of the work with the horses.

*P4 page20/1 "that interaction [with the horse] and the content we put round it, the debrief we do afterwards, the observations of other people. You have to trust that, that process, and just the experience of doing something different has an impact on people. But we don't tend to nail people to making it clear 'this is what I learnt today and this is how I am going to put it into action and this is my SMART goals' at the end of the day because it is an experiential day and the particular models we are working with, the learning is happening unconsciously"*

This quote highlights two other things that 4 participants mentioned: that the learning, the insight might take days, weeks or even months to land; and that the learning may not be conscious, or able to be articulated. So, there seems to be a belief that even though a client might not have an insight they can articulate there and then, they will have still learnt something on some level. This is fairly sophisticated way of thinking about learning. The client does not need to process the experience sufficiently in the time they have with the horses and be able to demonstrate what has been learnt there and then. Instead the learning may have happened on a more embodied level, not necessarily easily verbalised. There was mention by a couple of participants that there was a degree of trust needed, to believe that the learning was inherent in the experience. There is a fine line between trusting in the process of working with a horse to generate insight at some point, and 'just playing with horses'. P4, as a psychologist, acknowledges that the phrase 'trust the process' is a bit wishy washy!

*P2 page 25 "I think it needs to make sense somewhere, but I don't necessarily think… If someone says to me, "Do you know actually I get it, but I don't know what it means." I am fine with that; I am actually fine with that because to me it will come or generally it comes."*

*P4 page 21 " this is just a start of unpicking a raise into the consciousness and some of the things that are happening unconsciously so it's unrealistic to expect people to have an "Ah ha!" moment…They might have had it but they can't talk about it."*

However, the experience of working in this way suggests that client's do indeed have learning that manifests at different times and in different ways. P4 mentions clients still referencing the experience with horse 5 years later. And P7 gives an example of a client who had a somatic memory triggered months after the experience with a horse:

*P7 page 15 "I was talking to this guy a couple of months later he said, "It was really interesting – I was going into a meeting that I knew was going to be really difficult and I caught myself looking at the floor – so I thought – 'What would [Horse] have done?' so I put my shoulders back and lifted my eye contact and I don't think I said anything different but I had a different impact – and I hadn't thought about it until that second when I caught myself looking at the floor."*

So the idea that learning is somehow present in the body, even if the client can't access that learning consciously or verbally, is an interesting one. Many of the traditional approaches to leadership development are being supplemented by experiential learning. However, this is not just any experience to generate that learning. P6 talked about supporting leaders to remember innate capabilities for leading in complexity by learning from masters of the art. P3 talks about embodying purpose:

*P3 page 10 "Once people are calm, they know about being present, they've learnt something about their energy, its then exploration of what's their purpose. Where do they feel it? Can they bring it into their body, in an embodied way, with the right kind of energy, to motivate themselves, or others or the horses, or to overcome obstacles or whatever it is?*

This links in with something that P7 says about different ways of knowing, which is perhaps a challenge to traditional notions of learning which is about being able to grasp what someone else knows. Whereas true experiential learning is personal and connects with who each person is as a

leader, rather than some abstract idea of 'leadership'. This will be explored further in the discussion. There may also be the degree to which the client is mature as a learner. Some groups may find it a challenge to pay attention to the physical, body awareness data that most participants talked about. This may fundamentally challenge what the client thinks of as learning. The ideas around this and transformational learning will be covered more in the discussion.

One final thing to note under theory of learning is a point that P4 made, which was that sometimes clients are still learning from observing others. So vicarious learning as opposed to just personal experiential learning. As mentioned previously though, this can be something to pay attention to if a group gets caught up in observing others to glean what the 'right' way of working with a horse might be. It has also been mentioned that the skills of observing are often taught and as such the learning is not totally experiential in that respect. However, it was noted that by teaching the basics of good observation, it can help client's tune in to the body language of others which in turn primes them tuning into their own physical awareness.

## SAFETY, RISK AND EMOTIONAL DEFENCE MECHANISMS

*safety but out of comfort zone/risk, willingness to learn, a discovery or curiosity mindset*.

In both the theory and practice of facilitation, much was mentioned by all the participants on the importance of physical and emotional safety. However, there was acknowledgment that, once that safety had been established, it was important to be able to take some risks. This is like the paradox of the situation needing to be both hospitable and charged, bounded and open, in order for learning to occur. In the examples below, two of the participants describe taking client's out of their comfort zone to see what behaviour emerges when they do. Interestingly, this may be an active choice by the facilitator to choose an activity that is likely to give the client an experience that they can gain some useful insight from. This relies on the facilitator either being told by the client that something is an issue they would like to work on, or being able to discern this from watching how the client interacts.

*P1 page27 "you need to be willing to go, not outside your comfort zone, but at least close to the edge. I always say that people learn is what they do when they don't know what to do….When you get to somewhere that stretches you, at your limit, what do you do? What pattern do you run? Some people become overly aggressive, assertive, some people freeze…. being prepared to learn not just achieve a task."*

*P4 page 30 "it's picking the appropriate exercise for their energy. If someone is having difficulty setting certain boundaries then I get them to get a horse to take a few steps backwards; if someone goes straight to task all the time, I'll give them something where they'll have to break it down….So it's whatever pushes them out of their comfort zone really."*

In the first example this seems like it may well occur as a natural response from a client interacting with a horse. This may also be relatively early on in the programme, with the second example being further along. The idea that risk is useful or even necessary for learning will be explored further in the discussion.

This raises a number of questions. Firstly, how willing is the learner to learn and not just achieve a task? Two of the participants mentioned supporting the clients to have a discovery mindset, to be

curious rather than thinking about succeeding or failing. It was also mentioned the tasks themselves as simply being vehicles for the interaction with the horse, and as such irrelevant to a degree.

Another question could be, is the facilitator deliberately choosing an exercise to help shift a client out of their comfort zone? So on one level, the task is irrelevant as the interaction with the horse is what will generate data. Both P1 and P4 talked about using exercises that may be general or specific to support a particular learning goal. P3 also has six distinct phases that a client may be taken through depending on various factors such length of session, client needs etc. So, this links us back to structure and how active the facilitator is in making informed choices to help create a learning experience.

So it seems that the theories of learning encompass a wide range of ideas that have subtle and explicit impacts on the design and facilitation of EAL. This may be a decision to intervene or not at different stages of learning; it may be the structure of a session that puts in place the foundations needed for clients to learn from the experience; or it might be the belief that learning does not need to be verbalised for it to have occurred. Many of these ideas will be revisited and explored further in the discussion.

## THE ROLE OF THE HORSE

For all the participants, the Interaction with the horse is central, it is their feedback and responses which either implicitly or explicitly guides how they work with clients. The horse is the primary source of data and some participants even try to put themselves in to the horse's perspective. As P1 says: p9 *" I might just see or sense something, maybe some discomfort in the horse….it's more perhaps second positioning the horse as a means of getting what's going on for the person….How would I feel if I were the horse?"*

Some would say that the horse is the teacher or developer, sharing their own energy and wisdom with the client in their own right. Whereas others may refer to the horse as a second facilitator, who is more sensitive, and can guide their human counterpart. However they are described, the information they give is extremely useful and is seen as something that would be much harder to pick up on if the horse wasn't there.

P3 page 15 *"So I pick up much more data in body is what I'm saying about clients if I've got a horse there than I would in a meeting room on my own."*

*P7 page 3 "So I might have been able to pick up on what some of them were doing from an energetic perspective, had [the horse] not been there, but it is just a darned site easier when he is!"*

The horse can also be a catalyst for the client's emotions, particularly around fear or anxiety. This is part of what makes the work 'charged'. Sometimes clients will express fear before meeting the horse, or it may only be when they get there that it comes to the surface. However, this may not be a fear of horses per se, but they may bring up fears such as being out of control, failure, discomfort with uncertainty etc. Two of the participants would overtly confront some of the fears created by assumptions of horses, such as that they will kick out or that they are unpredictable. Participant 3 in particular would actively work with the emotions provoked by being around the horses and support clients to use those emotions as data. P3 will also watch for the horse's response to the client in terms of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system. *P24 "I know that a release and the*

*down swing has started because the horse will start licking and chewing. Or depending on the horse… If the horse hasn't shown some sign of release, the work's not done yet."*

The focus on observing the horse's behaviour and using that as feedback to the client was also a common theme. It can help to provide an anchor or point to return to when the facilitator's attention is on so many things at once. As already discussed, whether the facilitator focuses on helping the client notice what the horse's response was or giving an observation, often depended on the maturity of the learners or their perspective on the role of the facilitator. The sensitivity of the horses to change their behaviour the instant something changed in the client was mentioned by most participants. However, the data the horses give is only reliable as long as they are happy and well. P1 was particularly clear about responsibility to horse welfare and never doing anything that would compromise that. P3, 4 and 7 also mentioned the downside of knowing the horses well, or needing to be aware of the impact of their energy on what was happening between the horse and client.

Horses are the central focus for this work, but learning to pick up on and use what they give is an art.

### IDENTITY

This final theme is perhaps more for illustration than analysis. In developing an understanding of how each of the participants' 'life worlds' had influenced them and their practice, a few adjectives came up time and again to describe what it had felt like listening to each of them. The following are just a few that seem to resonate most strongly:

| |
|---|
| *Humble, beyond ego, in service of others, non-attached – having let go of certainties, comfortable with not knowing, open, life-long learners, curious, compassionate, rejecting of traditional ways of being with horses, thoughtful, congruent, authentic, spiritual, connected* |

The amount of richness coming from the accounts of these seven different practitioners is considerable. The central themes of how they each think about and practice their facilitation in service of learning over lap and interweave. The next chapter will seek to understand how or indeed if, this fits with what we already know in the fields of facilitation and learning in the context of experiential, leadership development.

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

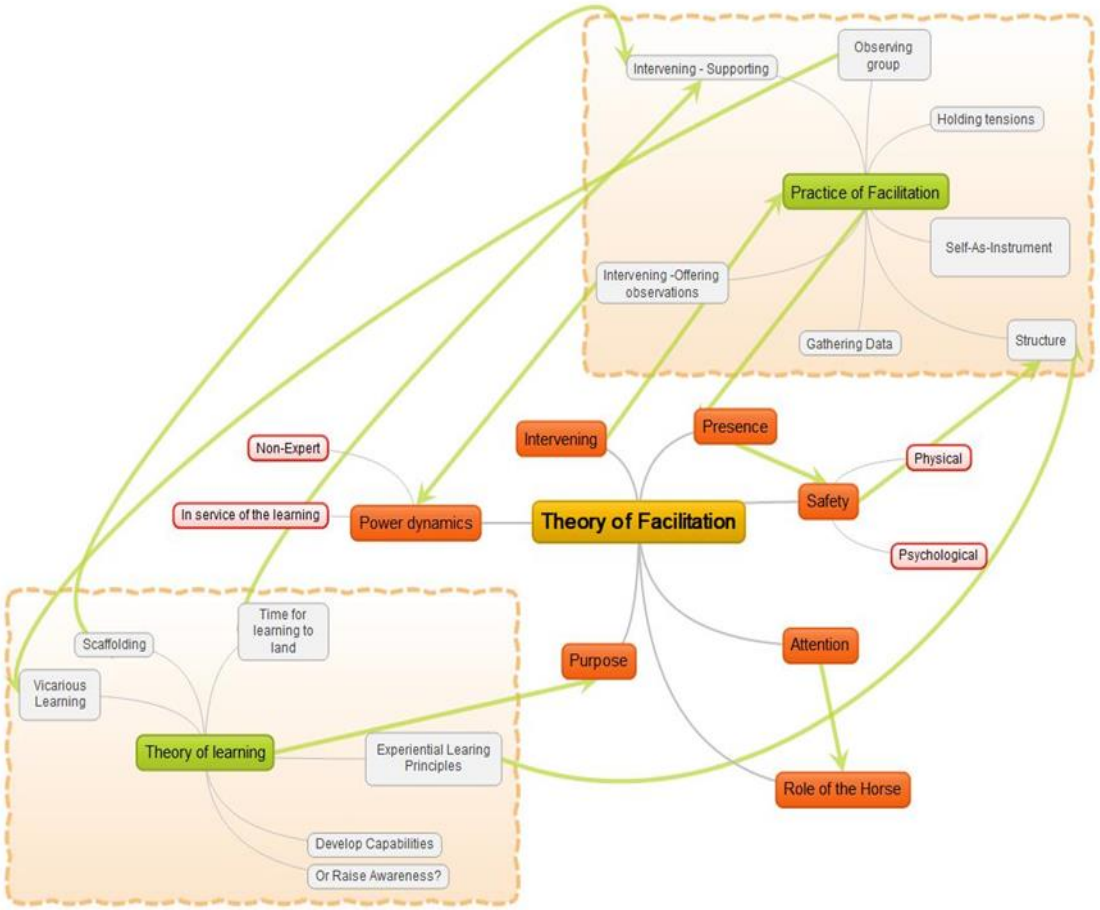



Figure 5: Mind map of connections between superordinate themes

Summary

The main findings suggest the following:

## PRESENCE

- That each participant was able to embody their own authentic presence which meant that they were aware of their physical sensations and intuitions and open to what emerged in the moment.
- They were able to reflect both in action and on action, demonstrating their ability to work actively from that state of presence
- They could role model this presence as well as helping clients access their own presence
- Each participant described in some way being beyond ego, to be in service of their clients, and thus contributing to a felt sense of safety through that quality of attention and presence
- Each participant actively developed their presence, knowledge and skills to maintain their instrumentality

### Safety

- Safety refers to both physical and emotional safety, both of which were given particular attention
- Structuring and directing tasks was often done to maintain physical safety. However, the learning from those tasks was never directed. Structure was seen as creating freedom within a safe container
- Each participant was adept at creating and holding a psychologically safe space through
  - Presence
  - Quality of attention
  - Confidentiality
  - Non-judgemental through well-developed self-awareness
  - Creating a learning or discovery mindset (no success or failure)
  - Ability to work with whatever emerged from the horse-human interaction

### Interventions

- Each participant had a clear purpose of intervening to keep the experience in the here and now, about the interaction with the horse to illicit feedback
- Interventions were used to raise awareness in the human through horse behaviour
- Observations were seen as intervention in their own right
- Encouraging clients to use emotions as data and to see what was in the mirror of the horse behaviour
- Intervening to support experimentation if needed
- Intervening to support sense making and transfer of learning only if necessary
- Aware of power dynamic between facilitator and learners, and careful not to privilege the facilitators voice
- Actively involving the observers as well as encouraging learners to take personal responsibility for their learning

### Attention

- In multiple places including self, horse, clients, observers and environment
- Horse as primary source of data
- Able to process internal and external data without losing presence and quality of attention
- Awareness of own judgements and projections
- Able to draw client's attention to internal and external data

### Learning

- There were different philosophical positions which ranged from the purpose of the experience was to develop particular capabilities vs simply to raise awareness
- There were subtle differences in whether an experience was seen as learning or developmental and each had slightly different facilitation approaches
- There was a common ethos of respect for clients as equal partners in the learning experience, which supported the idea of not privileging the facilitators voice
- Each participant had a strong focus on somatic and embodied learning, which may or may not be amenable to being articulated on the day
- Whilst some participants referred to experiential learning theory, the embodied nature means that there was much less abstract conceptualising or theory. Some participants actively sought to keep clients out of their heads to maintain a focus on the felt experience.

- There was a clear difference in philosophy when it came to insight and meaning making. This was that it happens spontaneously without intervention vs it can happen spontaneously, but more often than not it will need some supportive intervention
- What else sits around the experience with the horses is an important consideration i.e. what other elements such as coaching are present; where it sits in a wider programme etc.
- Learning happens when there is sufficient safety to take risks. These risks are aimed at creating a learning experience, not just an experience. Otherwise its 'just having a nice time with horses'

# CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

## OVERVIEW

The previous chapter has thoroughly articulated the answer to my first aim, which was to understand how exemplars think about their practice, what underpins it and what bodies of knowledge they draw on. This chapter seeks to do two things: Firstly I want to take the rich data from the research, which describes how existing EALD practitioners think about how they facilitate, and relate it to existing bodies of knowledge. This corresponds to the second aim of this research. The way it is facilitated is indeed connected to established approaches. This creates a basis for the credibility of this method of doing experiential learning with leaders. It also provides a foundation for novice practitioners and those who believe themselves to be pioneers, and points them in the direction of established methods and experiences that can be gained to underpin their practice with horses. It is also a resource for more experienced practitioners to ground their practice and professional development in the current literature.

The second purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the third aim of this research, namely to create a generative conversation and curriculum to support the development of EALD practitioners. This sets out more explicitly the subtle nuances and the specific extensions to existing bodies of knowledge that makes the practice of EALD special. My implicitly held question for structuring this discussion was "What do we know about facilitating experiential learning with leaders, and does it stack up when working with a horse?" The answer was "Yes, and…" Whilst this is not about theory generation, an understanding of how the different elements of the facilitation of EALD come together in this unique method would be useful for providing a deeper understanding of what would need to be mastered by novice facilitators as well as giving more experienced practitioners specific aspects of practice, knowledge and understanding to reflect on.

## CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE DATA AND ESTABLISHED BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE

With a rich and varied data set, maintaining focus and clarity of argument is important. I will use the theory of facilitation as the spine for this discussion with connections made to the other superordinate themes. The aim is to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.

Whilst some of the findings link back to the academic literature outlined in the knowledge landscape, there are novel combinations and connections as well as new avenues to explore. Much of what was illustrated in the findings can be articulated by referring back to key figures such as John Heron, Trevor Bentley, Donald Schon and David Kolb. However, the subtle expressions and links cannot be fully expressed by any one thinker or practitioner. There are particular emphases, e.g. safety, which takes on a new meaning when discussed in the context of working with horses. I will take each of the main themes and concepts from the superordinate theme of the Theory of Facilitation and illustrate that element of the findings with contemporary literature and its application to EALD

### THEORY OF FACILITATION

I want to begin this section with a definition from Trevor Bentley.

"Advanced Facilitation is, for us, about working with a high degree of flexibility to deal with what emerges in the group as they work together. This means taking further steps towards heightening awareness of what is going on…advanced facilitation is more about the way the facilitator **is**, and less about what they **do.***"* (Bentley & Boorman, 2013, p. 7) (emphasis in original).

Facilitating learning with horses is advanced facilitation by this definition. His focus is on groups and how they interact, whether they are well-established and working towards specific organisational goals, or newly formed and transient, focused more on a learning experience. Even if the group has mainly individual learning goals, they are temporarily a group and interpersonal processes and emotional dynamics occur. I would argue that even when there is just one client and they are interacting with a horse, some form of interpersonal dynamics begin to play out.

Bentley makes the point that the facilitator is not just there to achieve particular outcomes (that is training in his view). There is likely to be an element of working with the group process and dynamic to support a purpose, probably achieved by guiding the group through a series of activities. Where this becomes advanced facilitation is in working emergently with what comes up whilst engaging in these activities. This requires a great deal of flexibility, but also courage and awareness. This links neatly to one of the main themes from the findings, that of presence or the being of the facilitator.

## PRESENCE:

*The being of the facilitator, the holding of a space, connected to own felt sense, aware of self and other, being in service of/not about ego.*

This was a multifaceted area as described by the research participants and illustrated by list of concepts within the theme of presence above. As mentioned in Chapter four p57 this was powerfully described by participant one as: *"not to have preconceptions, not have expectations, not anticipate where things are going or what the next question is going to be; I think you have to kind of empty yourself…"* This theme was central to how all participants thought about themselves as they practiced facilitating leadership development with horses. Interestingly, there was very little literature on the place of presence in facilitation. I have turned to the therapeutic literature to get a clearer picture of how presence is being described currently. However, the depth of understanding described in chapter Four adds to this discourse and should be read in conjunction with this discussion/

There is growing interest in understanding what impact presence has in a therapeutic context (Colosimo & and Pos, 2015) and in navigating complexity as a leader in organisational contexts (Sell, 2017) (Goldman-Schuyler, et al., 2017) (Goleman, 2013). This is defined as: "…presence as related to "being in good contact with reality" (directly "touching" reality perceptually or phenomenologically). Contact with reality is thought to occur in three domains: (a) in the domain of our embodied experiences (feelings, thoughts, perceptions); (b) in the domain of the environment "external" to our bodies; and (c) in the domain of the interpersonal field" (Colosimo & and Pos, 2015, p. 101).

In these terms, the horse is providing what might be described as an unsocially mediated experience of contact, particularly in terms of b and c above. The skilled facilitator, with their own presence, help to bring the embodied domain into awareness for the client. *P3 page 9 "helping whoever it is to drop down, it will help them be present or notice what is getting in the way of them being present."* What the research participants were saying in different ways, was that unless they were fully present then it was going to be difficult for the clients they were working with to find their own sense of presence. It wasn't that as a facilitator they had to be aware of everything, but open enough to notice and make sense of what was happening on a number of different levels.

Participant 4 also mentioned quite a complex internal thought process, effectively scanning those multiple levels of thoughts, feelings, sensations, perceptions, in their own bodies, as well as noticing external cues in both horse and client.

The interpersonal presence, is described in Colosimo and Pos as the facilitator having the client as their 'figure'. With EALD, the facilitator needs to hold both the client and the horse as their 'figure'. The authors have a useful way of classifying the different elements of presence. These are:

*BEING HERE:* - this is to have one's attention anchored in this place, with this group and with one's own physical sensations as well as noticing and commenting on how the client is physically embodying their state. This was a central approach for a number of the participants, though not all actively commented on the physical to their clients.

*BEING NOW:* - this relates to being attuned to the present moment and how that unfolds rather than thinking about past or future. This was displayed by the participants in this research by noticing behaviour and the subtle questions to help clients connect i.e. 'what just happened when…'

*BEING OPEN:* - this was the capacity to perceive and receive, which relates to what the participants were describing when they talked about being free from preconceptions, but also when describing letting the interaction unfold or emerge.

*BEING WITH AND FOR:-* this relates strongly to being without ego also mentioned by some of the participants, but also relates to having respect and compassion for the client. In the context of the paper, the authors mention the idea of a being a safe attachment figure. We will come back to this in particular when discussing safety.

### Challenges with maintaining presence

Interestingly, the authors mentioned the difficulty of holding this kind of presence and the kinds of things that could get in the way. Some of these potential disruptors were mentioned by the participants such as the physical resources required and finding the experience tiring; or not needing to prove anything. Two of these disruptors that are particularly interesting are: over intellectualisation and being triggered by your own unresolved issues. The first, is about getting the balance right between having enough rational analytic engagement to bring some conceptual understanding, but without losing connection with the here and now, experiential understanding of the client. This was handled differently by different participants.

Participant 1 was particularly adamant that what got in the way of experiential learning was talking too much about the experience. As such, their approach was more to help the client to focus on the universal qualities of what it meant to be a leader, rather than connecting the work with horses to overt theories of leadership. Whereas other participants had a focus on simple concepts that helped to frame the experience in leadership. These often related to behaviours that might be observed in a horse herd and were used to keep the experience in the here and now.

The second, is vital, but perhaps only obliquely mentioned by four of the participants. This is about having enough self-awareness to know what your issues are and knowing if they have been triggered. This is where supervision, whether that be formally or through a peer network, is crucial. Otherwise unresolved or unacknowledged fears may be disrupting the facilitator's capacity to hold that presence. This area is one which needs further attention and consideration. Whilst most of the participants did describe some form of supervision, this was normally peer supervision. This is still vital, particularly when working with a group, to have someone to talk things through with if an resolved issue has been triggered. However, this does rely on enough self-awareness in the first

place. Practitioners of EALD need to give due care and attention to how they are developing on an on-going basis. This is not just the skills and knowledge, but the intrapersonal development that supports their ability to be present, and without their own issues unduly influencing the experience.

Even though Equine Assisted Leadership Development (EALD) is distinct from therapeutic work with horses, it seems that the quality of presence is still key. This is perhaps not surprising as both therapeutic work and learning have similarities in that they require the client to feel safe enough to become vulnerable. With leaders, the learning may require them to receive feedback about their impact or let go of assumptions or beliefs about themselves in order to shift their thinking and behaviour, not just acquire new information.

Most of the participants mentioned all three domains of presence in terms of their own awareness and being in 'good contact' with that data. This highlights the importance of cultivating this awareness and the 'being in the moment' as described in the findings.

### Presence as practice

Heron (Heron, 1999), as mentioned in the knowledge landscape, talks about what might be considered presence, when he mentions charismatic power as a facilitator. This is a state where the facilitator is a role model and empowering of others because they are 'flourishing from their own inner resources.' (p20). I do take issue with the language here, as 'charismatic' could easily be misconstrued. The potential for hubris here is considerable. My understanding of Heron, is that this is from a place of self-awareness and humility, not arrogance. This connects to some of the other concepts that came up in the findings, alongside presence; namely going beyond ego and being in service of the other/learner. To let go of your ego, but without letting go of expertise, and being able to hold a strong enough presence to be 'safe' is something that the participants had been developing for years.

For a facilitator to be fully present; self-aware on a somatic level as well as environmentally and interpersonally aware, is not easy. The emphasis in this kind of embodied learning on the physical awareness is, if not unique, it is particularly relevant when working with horses. It seems the art is to be fully self-aware, but not self-absorbed. As Jenkins and Jenkins (2006) say it is the balance between being detached and engaged, mediated by focus. This focus was described when participants talked about being in the moment, paying attention to multiple sources of data, but without preconceptions or judgements. Or it was described as noticing what those thoughts or judgements might be, and setting them aside or using them to further illuminate the picture that was emerging. By being aware and present in the moment to their own physical, emotional and cognitive processes, the skilful practitioner seemed to be able to bring all of who they were, but in service of the learning.

### Presence as part of reflective practice

Presence is also part of a reflective practice; it is part of what enables a practitioner to become aware of and use a combination of explicit and tacit knowledge, as well as noticing and setting aside judgements. As mentioned when considering a reflective practice in the chapter on knowledge landscape, this needs to be both knowing in action as well as reflecting in action, to enable a conscious use of experience and professional judgement, as well as being alive to the uniqueness that is this situation, here and now. And it needs to be reflection on action to maintain the facilitator's own development, deepening self-awareness and mitigating against unconscious projections and biases. All of the participants described in different ways how they used their experience, their tacit and explicit knowledge to work in the moment with each client. It was evident that the years of prior experience that had formed each participant were drawn upon to work with

each client in a unique way. However, some more than others had a regular focus on reflecting on action in order to refine their approach. The implications for developing the practice of facilitating EALD will be discussed shortly in connection to the down sides of being present, potentially in a state of Flow.

Interestingly, Donald Schon mentions the dangers of too much specialisation on the opportunities to develop practice:

"…as knowing in practice becomes increasingly tacit and spontaneous, the practitioner may miss important opportunities to think about what he is doing…through reflection, he can surface and criticize the tacit understandings….and make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness which he may allow himself to experience." (Schön, p. 61)

Schön has been criticised for being too imprecise in his description of the relationship between knowing in action and reflection in action (Mintz, 2016 ). His descriptions often reference different professions and their subjective experience of what it is like to experience that combination of technical knowing and in the moment doing. However, this seems to be somewhat unfair, as Mintz then goes on to describe a psychoanalytic approach to naming or explaining this uncertainty in the moment. It seems odd that his contention is that uncertainty should be regarded as productive, and yet appears to want to make it less uncertain by putting another theory around it. However, he does have a useful description of what is happening in that moment of uncertainty, of knowing and not knowing:

"Their knowledge about teaching does not disappear, it is made use of unconsciously as a pre-conception, which is then saturated by the actual experience of that particular teaching experience to create a saturated formation, a thought translated in to action, that is the decision to choose a particular teaching strategy in a particular moment." p287

Whilst this article is written from the perspective of a teacher, and with the focus of special educational needs, he makes an interesting point about retaining the sense of uniqueness and respect for the other which was characterised by a number of participants: "the idea of productive uncertainty, where tolerating the difficulty of not knowing, can ultimately lead to a better, more nuanced, more flexible understanding of the human other across from you." P292. His argument is that we only really know another through attending to the relationship, and so knowledge is inherently intersubjective, or, in my language, co-constructed. The focus on being present; to this person, this horse, this client in their context, is a vital part of what it means to practice this sort of development. Whether you are a teacher, therapist, social worker or leadership developer, the importance of presence as a state from which to engage with clients is key.

### Potential downsides of being present

I was intrigued by something that came out of some of the second interviews, which was the potential downsides of being in the moment. This state of presence could be akin to a state of flow (Yaden, et al., 2017) in that there is an absorption into the task with a loss of a sense of self, whilst balancing skill and challenge. However, there is a dilemma here. As mentioned by Dietrich (2004), this flow state may actively inhibit being able to reflect in the moment. In his article on Flow state and information processing, Dietrich states: "…the explicit-implicit distinction is applied to the effortless information processing that is so characteristic of the flow state….From the analysis of this flexibility/efficiency trade-off emerges a thesis that identifies the flow state as a period during which a highly practiced skill that is represented in the implicit system's knowledge base is implemented without interference from the explicit system." P746 .

This article does seem to be referring to the use of a motor skill such as athletic or musical performance, but it may still have implications for the facilitator. Some of the participants did describe finding it difficult to reflect on what they had done in any particular session because of this phenomenon. Participant 3 in particular mentioned not being able to remember what happened in a session the previous week, because: *"They're just gone. I'm there and then I'm not and then it is gone…"* (Chapter 4 p58). The implications for this and developing the habits of a reflective practice on the future development of EALD facilitators is key. If it is so hard to remember what you did, how can you reflect in order to improve? One participant suggested that, having used video to support enhanced recall, that might be an answer. Video could be used both for training purposes i.e. observe a session with a horse and client and then discuss ways of making sense and intervening; and for reflection, either with a supervisor or peer. Whilst this may have some issues such as privacy and getting sufficient quality of video, this is something that as a community of practitioners, we need to consider

## Safety:

*physical, psychological, risk and learning. The role of the 'holding' environment, contracting, containers and boundaries, being directive/hierarchical*

This theme was particularly strong with several interrelated concepts as outlined above. Whilst safety is important for learning, the aspect of physical safety whilst being around 'half a ton of flight animal' as one participant described them, brings this area in to sharper focus. This section will explore the literature around safety, and look at the application in an EALD context.

### Presence and safety

One aspect of the previous theme, presence, that creates a link to the next aspect of theory of facilitation i.e. safety, is the ability to hold a space. So, what does it means to hold a space?

*"the holding or potential space allows possibilities to be held open; there is a sense of safety in this openness that does not rely on self-assertion. Winnicott argues that all deep learning experiences are modelled on the example of the young child playing in the presence of an un-intrusive mother. When students are in the presence of someone who guards them without interference, they learn to trust their authentic responses to new situations. The implication of Winnicott's argument is that teachers need the patience and courage to avoid pre-empting the student's learning process, to avoid giving the student answers for which they are not prepared. Teachers need to stay present to the emerging dialogue, rather than being distracted by their preconceptions and their own subjective fears and desires"* (Game & Metcalf, 2009, p. 48)

This comes from an education perspective, but it is also a useful description of what was articulated in the findings from my participants. The first word to stand out is 'un-intrusive'. Each participant described in their own ways being both present and absent, there but not filling the space. A mistake I've seen too many times is for novice facilitators to fill the space. This might be by talking too much, or by adding too much of their own personal stories, or their own interpretations and certainties. Whereas, these experienced practitioners all knew how to be un-intrusive, leaving that space for the learners to explore, but still 'guarding' them. This is where safety comes in, both physically and emotionally, and potentially what was meant by a safe attachment figure, as mentioned above.

The last sentence also speaks to the self-awareness, the state and stage of development the facilitator may be in. To be present to the emerging dialogue requires a degree of confidence and assuredness that was common amongst the research participants. However, as already mentioned, this was not ego based. It was more indicative of a confidence that did not need to prove anything,

yet still open to learning and humble. It may be that what these experienced facilitators are describing is their own stage of development i.e. the individualist stage. This is when they can, "…abandon purely rational analysis in favour of a more holistic, organismic approach in which feelings, body sensations and context are taken into account." (Cook-Greuter, 2013) p55.

It is not possible to know from which stage of development these facilitators are operating, but it is interesting that many of the characteristics of this stage also resemble descriptions given and themes emerging from the data. For example, the tensions that are held such as holding boundaries and structure, whilst being emergent to possibilities; Connections are seen between different sources of data and subtle cues are noticed; there is a greater understanding of how the mind and body interact; there is a focus on the present, being able to get a sense of what is embodied and the human dynamics of a situation all form part of what is in their awareness.

The final aspect of this quote that stands out is the part about avoiding giving answers for which the student is not prepared. This is perhaps another dilemma to be held in tension with the last point. Would a working knowledge of what stage a client was at influence how a facilitator worked? This may be something for future research. However, the perspective a facilitator can take on themselves and the world may have an impact on how they resolve the tensions inherent in working emergently.

Some of the participants in the research described clients being at different levels of awareness, or maturity as learners. All participants in some way, had a focus on increasing the client's awareness, and particularly their awareness of the physical or felt senses. Is this just co-incidence? In my experience as a facilitator, as outlined in my knowledge landscape, most clients are usually at either Expert or Achiever stage and the next stage is the Individualist. This is the first stage where non-cognitive data can be taken as truly valid. Each of the participants seemed to be stretching their clients into that individualist way of paying attention to themselves and the world. Whilst it may be a deliberate choice to do so, the rationale behind that choice may not be explicit.

As expressed in the context of a facilitated rather than didactic learning experience, Naude et.al state that: "Empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness, all components of a student-centred approach (Rogers 1969, 1983; Cornelius-White 2007) are crucial elements of a positive learning environment as it facilitates students comfort to be open to learning. This experience of safety with the facilitators provided students with courage…." (2014, p. 222/3)

### Contract for safety

Something that forms part of safety is the idea of having an explicit contract. This could range from establishing confidentiality to agreeing how to be with each other if there is conflict or upset. As Schwarz (2005) notes, you may use ground rules as a way of supporting group effectiveness, but unless it has underlying principles and assumptions, it is just another technique. His values and assumptions may be particularly useful when facilitating intact work groups who come together to solve problems. However, they may not be the right values or assumptions for working developmentally with leaders.

In my practice, the idea of a contract is sometimes referred to as 'Permissions and preventions'. This makes it explicit what permissions I have as a facilitator, but also what the individuals have permission to do too. This is similar to Schwartz's free and informed choice, but goes beyond that. For example I will seek permission to use imperatives such as 'step back' on physical safety grounds. These will usually go alongside preventions which is being clear about what a client's responsibility is in looking after their own physical safety.

What are the unique situations that need to be thought about when creating a contract for safety around horses? What are the values that would underpin those? Implicitly and explicitly, the participants in the research gave some insight into their own values and the way they handle both physical and emotional safety. This might be a belief that each client is a whole human being who is capable of making choices for themselves. Or it might be a belief that it would be unsafe to expect people with no experience of working with horses to keep themselves safe without support. Both are valid and true, but may have different implications for what kind of contract might be agreed.

### Risk and safety

There may be some fundamental assumptions about the role of risk and taking clients out of their comfort zone in order to create learning. This was mentioned by a number of the participants, but participant 4 in particular. Without an element of risk then the likelihood of getting significant learning would be limited Another is the role of emotions and possible defence mechanisms. Both would need to be included when thinking about how to set up some form of contract or ground rules. All participants mentioned some form of contract, but this ranged from a simple but profound safety agreement that was set in advance and focused on personal responsibility for safety contributing the group safety; to a co-constructed agreement that was created a new for each client group. Participant 6 was particularly strong on safety as a prerequisite to any form of learning. This was both physical and emotional safety. Those views were focused more on the design and explicit structures rather than a formal contract as such as will be discussed in more detail below.

Interestingly there is little written on this topic in academic journals. There was some interesting debate in relation to the politics of teaching ground rules for talking to children (Lambirth, 2009), which did actually bear some resemblance to Schwarz's ground rules e.g. Share ideas, Give reasons, Question ideas etc. (p425). Or Wang (2010) who talks about designing ground rules to promote spontaneous student facilitation in on-line learning scenarios with undergraduates. However, both these examples are when the facilitator creates the ground rules and gives them to the group. This is an option with adult learners, but it is probably more common to co-create them. I am curious that this topic appears, within leadership development at least, either not to have been considered as part of research or it could be considered something that is just a simple tool.

In my experience, even if contracting is done well, it is rare that groups would fully understand the importance of this. Often, establishing confidentiality is a key part of helping a group feel safe, but the other 'permissions and preventions' such as 'how do we need to be if it gets sticky?' don't necessarily mean much until the need for them actually arises. The conversation can be revisited or referred to at that point, so it is important to have it in the first place. It may be that part of the value of having that sort of conversation up front is that it can sensitize the client to the depth to which a programme may go. This is not the same as assuming there will be emotional responses, but by normalizing it, it can create tacit permission. What this does imply though, is that as a facilitator, you do need to be prepared for whatever could come up. This includes emotions and emotional defence mechanisms.

### Normalising emotions

Emotions are a part of the learning experience, but that does not mean to say that everyone will become overwhelmed by them. In the related field of gaming and simulations as experiential learning vehicles Hermann (2015) looks at the use of Kurt Lewin's Field Theory and how it related to the facilitation of this kind of experiential learning activity. Whilst her focus is on group dynamics, there are some interesting parallels when working with horses. For example, intervening to prompt reflection in the moment, particularly on noticing what is happening within and between people (or

horses) and: “working in the present and using reflection in group dynamics as a mirror…. This enables emotionally anchored learning experiences instead of cognitive understanding only, and supports the behavioural change process.” P218

Hermann also makes the point that an inexperienced facilitator may be tempted to control or direct particularly if strong emotions are present.

*“An insecure facilitator who feels the need to exert more control to avoid dealing with negative emotions when group conflicts arise may constrain the debriefing. This behaviour is inconsistent with the goal of creating a learning environment that self-organizes, and instead re-establishes a classical teaching situation within which the role of the teacher is to deliver knowledge”* p210

The authors note that the ability to stay open and follow what is happening, to create a sense of exploration, is not easy.

Understanding and holding the emotional life of an individual learner or a group is something that seems imperative to maintain psychological safety. There were examples of clients becoming tearful or otherwise emotional described in the findings. When helping a client get in touch with their physical sensations and implicitly their feelings, emotions are often closely connected. Whether this is a welcome reconnection or a surprise eruption of hidden or suppressed emotions, clients need to experience this as something that is safe to do. Participant 6 (quoted on p61) describes a simple, but elegant way of holding an emotional response safely, by gently redirecting a client’s attention when they were experiencing a powerful emotion. Compassion and an open hearted approach seemed to be common to most participants when dealing with the emotional life of the client group. This could range from the gentle redirecting of attention, to a giving of space and time with the horse to enable the emotions to flow and be resolved. None of the participants described being in any way discomforted by emotional responses, allowing them to be a holding presence as necessary.

When describing an action learning set process Pedlar (2016, p. 217) talks about the group being surprised that that environment allowed them to surface feelings and emotions that they would otherwise have kept hidden in the work place. By actively working with both thoughts and feelings, EALD is likely to be another environment which facilitates the connection with emotions that would otherwise have stayed hidden.

Illeris (2004) says “It is furthermore fundamental that both rational and emotional elements in the broadest sense are involved in learning, and that psychological phenomena like blockings, distortions, defence, resistance, and similar factors may play a role in the learning process.” P435

### Structure and Safety

As was described in the findings, some participants had a clear structure which enabled them to create freedom in the moment. This supported the creation of a safe learning environment, both physically and emotionally. The physical safety is taken care of when there are simple exercises that have been designed for those who are novices around horses. This is an interesting one, as so often novice facilitators seem to get hung up on what exercises to do for leadership clients. I have seen all sorts of equipment used from tarpaulins on the floor to large exercise balls. I am not sure what design principles are employed when choosing to use some of this equipment. They appear to be more designed to give the client’s something ‘interesting’ to do, rather than designing exercises that will support the interaction of the horse and human. The consideration of what is safe for this particular horse to do, is just as much of a physical safety concern as what is safe for the client to do. If you have horses that are used to this kind of equipment then their reaction will still be to the signals the client is giving. However, if they aren’t accustomed then this would be questionable. Even

so, I would question whether the training necessary to become familiar might in some way change their natural responses.

Well-structured and boundaried session supports emotional safety by allowing the facilitator to give close attention to what is actually happening in the moment with the client. That also enables them to contain or put a boundary around the scope of the session. Interestingly this did not always need to be done by a structure. One of the participants explained that if the intent of a session was to have a taster experience, then they were very clear that a participant couldn't then chose to work on their relationship with their mother. However, Boydell (2016) also talks about structure in reference to different stages of learning. He describes his own use of a structure based around Kolb's learning cycle: "I also enthusiastically embraced so-called discovery learning, usually carefully /cunningly structured activities that lead learners to discover what trainers wanted them to…"*p8*

### DILEMMAS OF SAFETY

He then goes on to say that whilst this kind of learning may be enjoyable, clients found it less relevant. He makes the point that this sort of learning has implied power dynamics that keep learners dependant and passive. It also does not promote the kind of development that is often sought. I.e. taking personal responsibility for learning, openness to feedback, tolerance of ambiguity etc. (Boydell, 2016, p. 11). So it seems that there is a dilemma; having simple structures for the activities with the horses, and having bounded intent can support the physical and emotional safety for clients. However, that has to be tempered with awareness of the power dynamics and the potential for creating a 'facilitator knows best' situation which could interfere with the broader development of clients.

This connects with theories of learning and what the difference is between learning and development. It seems that Boydell is saying that learning is about the gaining of new information or skill and that development is more personal. The aspects of this self-development are perhaps best described by becoming more whole, more connected to self, others and context or environment. Interestingly, this is similar to Heron's perspective on the role of the facilitator, i.e. to support the development of the whole person or self-authoring or even self-transforming individuals (Kegan & Laskow-Lahey, 2009)

So from a discussion of safety, we have ended up thinking about the purpose and nature of learning and development. In a modern leadership development environment, it is not enough to think of emotional safety in terms of the facilitator's responsibilities alone. If the purpose of development is to support the growth of the whole person, then the methods chosen also need to promote the personal responsibilities of the learners too. The balance to be struck is creating enough safety for the learner to feel empowered and capable enough of creating their own sense of safety. Each of the participants worked implicitly or explicitly with this dilemma and were careful not to privilege the facilitator's voice. But it is a kind of 'bootstrapping'; as a facilitator I need to help you feel safe enough so that you can realise that you can create your own sense of emotional safety. So, for some clients the balance might be towards the facilitator holding that safety strongly because the client is not yet able to do so for themselves. Heron might term this a hierarchical stance, or a 'doing for'. It is incumbent on the facilitator to find out, assess or notice when a client is more able to do this for themselves and may require a more co-operative approach, a 'doing with'.

## Intervening

*observation, feedback, raise awareness, experiment*

The themes that came out of the research were largely more towards the gentle, supportive, or co-operative end of the various intervention spectrums. However, the different areas that a facilitator could intervene in, were only described reasonably generically. I will take the concepts of observation, feedback etc as outlined above and connect them to a number of different ways of thinking about the what and the how of intervening

What does it mean to intervene? My bible for intervening has always been Heron (Ibid) though he is by no means the only person who has described the areas a facilitator can have an impact with a client or group. Heron's six areas of intervening and his modes of operation will be summarised first. I will compare this with three other ways of thinking about interventions those of Schwarz (2005), Bentley (Bentley & Boorman, 2013) and Reddy (1994) and their application to Equine Assisted approaches.

Heron talked about six areas that a facilitator should pay attention to when working with a group. These are planning, structuring, feeling, meaning, valuing and confronting. I'm not going to cover them all in detail, but will highlight some of what seems particular and not easily identifiable in other approaches.

### *PLANNING*

Planning is something that happens before the learning event takes place. This is not as simple as the facilitator thinking about the design of the event. Participant 6 in particular mentioned the lengths to which they went to understand the context of the client and the connections that would need to be made to keep the learning relevant. Whilst it wasn't something that was explored specifically, some research participants mentioned being the experiential element in a wider programme. The conversations that happen before an event are still a form of intervention. The facilitator can have an influence on the contracting client, and can shape the learning experience i.e. a doctor-patience model or perhaps a co-creation model. Or they can be passive, and accept the direction given by the contracting client i.e. a purchase- sale model. (Block, 2000) This is an interesting dilemma when thinking about how EALD fits into wider leadership development: how should EALD positioned? As an interesting experience that will be 'good' for the client? Or as useful method that can be adapted to meet different needs?

The power dynamics are not confined to simply the facilitator and the group. Many of the participants in the research were experienced learning and development professionals and independent consultants. They already had the experience to navigate the complexities of how learning and leadership development were positioned within the client, and what part the Equine element would play. How this type of development is positioned needs to be taken in to consideration by the facilitator. In particular, how it is supported as well as what other experiences will go around the work with the horses. Where in a wider development programme this element fits matters. The degree to which the other facilitators, coaches or developers understand and can support this kind of learning, matters too. As this research is about the skills of a facilitator, I will not go in to the additional skills of an L&D consultant.

The other elements of Heron's model that are not necessarily covered by other approaches to facilitation include specific attention to feeling, or the emotional life of the group and valuing or respect for and supporting the person. The other elements of structuring, confronting and meaning,

are similar in many respects with Schwarz and Bentley, and will be explored more shortly. Reddy has his own typology which will be described too.

## *FEELING*

Heron talks about attending to or managing the emotional life of the group (Op.cit. p195) and outlines his positive emotional processes. Interestingly, almost all of them were described by the research participants as either something that was a goal of the programme or used to support emotions that had welled up. It is worth remembering that Heron makes a distinction between feeling which is about participating in, experiencing or attuning to the present moment, and emotion which has more to do with needs and wishes and whether they are fulfilled or not. Most of the participants worked with both. More or less explicitly, helping clients to attend to the present moment through breath or other physical practices was were most participants started. Heron's core emotional processes of identifying, owning and accepting emotions were central to several participant's practice. The other processes, such as controlling, redirecting, expressing or catharsis, were mentioned. So, whether consciously or not, each of the participants were using some of these approaches to intervene.

Heron goes on to look at all the ways that these emotional processes can be blocked and the different ways that a facilitator could work with a group on this dimension. This is particularly relevant as many of the participants gave examples of clients who were displaying some form of negative emotional process such as alienation, suppression, fixation, displacement etc (see Heron p198). For example it is common for clients who are less experienced in the more personal aspects of development to find it difficult to access their emotions. When asked 'how was that for you?' they are likely to give a cognitive response or a bland 'good' or 'fine'. So, helping a client to first access the felt sensations and then to begin to notice any emotions that go along with that is what Heron might call a hierarchical intervention on the feeling dimension.

Briefly, Heron makes the distinction between Hierarchical (doing for the learner what they can't yet do for themselves) and Co-operative interventions as those that the facilitator does *with* the learner. These may be initiated by the facilitator or by the learner. This may be encouraging the beginnings of owning and accepting an emotion; asking questions to help a client recognise a projection; or supporting the catharsis of a stuck emotion.

## *MEANING*

Heron talks about meaning or understanding as being on four levels, corresponding to his ideas around experiential learning i.e. that meaning can be made at the practical, conceptual, imaginal or experiential levels. I characterise the first two as 'knowing how' and 'knowing that'. In the context of EALD these might relate to some of the inputs around the different roles that exist in a horse herd and the application this might have from a human leadership perspective. The practical might be how to physically position oneself to lead in a particular way. However, the power of EALD comes into its own when the experiential and imaginal elements are added. Clients will often have a visceral 'a ha' moment, when something resonates (imaginal) and they get an experience which they often can't put into words.

The facilitator has choices here, as before, either to model for the group something that they cannot do for themselves, or support the group or individual in their own meaning making. As a large part of working with horses is to put a greater emphasis on the physical and the felt rather than the thought ways of meaning making, working predominantly at the imaginal level is key. Heron describes a number of different ways of doing this. For example, it may be that you decide that a metaphor is particularly apt and share it with the person leading the horse. Or, through your own body language

mirror what you see the client doing in order to bring it to their attention e.g. gripping a lead rope tightly. Similarly, the facilitator may see that a client is struggling to identify meaning for themselves and a tentative inference may be given to nudge them along e.g. 'the horse looks like she's going to take a chunk out of you. What is going on for you?'. In this case, explicitly helping the client to connect what is happening for them on an experiential level with the impact that is having on the horse. These would be hierarchical interventions, and should be used with caution.

What was more commonly described by the participants in the research were the co-operative interventions that support the client in sense making. Typically these would be giving observations, or eliciting feedback from other members of the group to give clean observations of horse and human behaviour or body language. Heron talks about non-specific questions like 'What is going on in the group right now?' which are very similar to the types of questions that came up frequently in the research. Another type of intervention might be to ask for resonances i.e. 'how is this familiar?' 'What does this remind you of?' etc. to help the client connect with the experience and assimilate it into their existing understanding. A number of the participants mentioned about how a client's patterns may show up whilst working with the horses. Sometimes these patterns are already in awareness, sometimes they are not.

As participant 5 mentions, it is often a case of less is more when thinking about whether to intervene or not "*The first temptation to intervene; the second temptation to intervene; the third temptation – maybe now, possibly? Maybe not? That ability to stand back and wait…. it is about making sense with them about what comes out of that rather than looking for it to be so called "successful".*

It is at this point that Heron's approach reaches its limits when it comes to working with a horse. Many of the other suggestions he makes are more appropriate for a classroom based environment e.g. presentational feedback and different forms of self and peer assessment. The number of times I have seen a shift in facial expression or subtle changes in body language in a client after an experience with a horse and said 'bank that feeling' or 'that's what X feels like' in order to help them grasp a moment that may not be amenable there and then to any other form of meaning making. This was also highlighted by participant 4 as well, the ability of the facilitator to spot that something has changed and to draw that to the client's attention without necessarily being able to articulate it is a key skill for the EALD facilitator

### Meaning and the non-human, sentient 'other'

There is of course the whole notion of making tentative meaning out of the horse behaviour, which adds a different dimension. This creates the added complexity of the client potentially being a novice at making sense of their own experience and how best to support that; as well as the client most likely being a novice at making sense of the horse behaviour and how best to use that in service of the learning. The added element of the horse often means that the facilitator is working on parallel tracks.

The first track is the facilitator making sense of the horse behaviour for themselves, trying to pay attention to the horse to give some clues as to what may be happening for the client. This in itself is a challenge. The level of attention required to notice the overt behaviour and the micro-cues that a horse can give is substantial. To then marry that with the overt and subtle physical cues given by the client, is also a challenge. The detailed observational skills required are not well covered in Heron, but I will return to Schwarz and Reddy to elaborate. To then add on trying to make tentative sense of what both of these sets of data may mean and to make an informed choice about how best to intervene to support the meaning making of the client (a second track) is complex indeed. And the

facilitator is also paying attention to the data they are picking up from their own somatic awareness (a third track) and paying attention to all the other things mentioned so far (safety, emotional processes, their own presence etc.). This was thoroughly described by both participants 3 and 4 on page 65. I want to reiterate at this point, that this is not an endeavour for an inexperienced facilitator.

The participant's had slightly different approaches to this. The quote by Oliver Wendell Holmes is apt here: "….the simplicity on the other side of complexity.." (Holmes, 2018). The noticing of what is, sharing some of those observation of both horse and client, and then simple questions were the main ways that the participants dealt with this level of complexity. Again, a note of caution here and to give the rest of the above quote: "I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity…" This is where the danger lies in inexperienced facilitators watching an experienced facilitator at work, and thinking that simple means easy.

### Different approaches to intervening in the meaning making process

Schwarz (ibid) has an approach which draws on the facilitator's meaning making process. He talks about observing behaviour and noticing patterns, making inferences and deciding whether and how to intervene. There are some similarities with the process described by participants in that they would observe the client and the horse, noticing the behaviours and making some tentative inferences. What was different is that, unlike Schwarz, the emphasis was often on supporting the client and the observing group to also notice and share their observations. So whilst the facilitator is observing it is not to 'diagnose', but instead to support the gathering of data that can be jointly made sense of.

Schwarz describes a useful next step, which is to test out the inferences with the group. It is important to make a distinction here between an inference and an interpretation. Inference in the context of facilitation is a tentative meaning, and educated guess at what something may mean. However, it is held lightly, offered, tested, refined or rejected by the client. If we are tempted to make an interpretation, there is an added element of certainty, a conclusion drawn from our own perspective. The participants in the research talked about offering inferences, often in the form of "I'm wondering if…?" or "It's almost as if…". Very rarely, it may be offered as a stronger assertion: "It seemed to me to be….". One participant described it as letting go of certainties. Again, I have seen inexperienced facilitators make interpretations without the awareness to temper these with the appropriate humility e.g. 'This is about courage'.

Whilst Schwarz has some useful tools and techniques, it appears to be coming from a position of the facilitator as expert who can diagnose and make many of the choices about what to bring in to the group's awareness. He also has a predominantly cognitive focus in that many of his interventions are focused on how the group is thinking and the processes they are using to complete a task. Whereas the focus of observation and meaning making with EALD is behavioural and embodied.

### Intervening at the task or socio-emotional level

Reddy (1994) also has a complex typology of interventions (see p82 for the intervention cube), with cognitive and skills or activities at the 'top' and interpretative at the 'bottom'. His perspective is that interpretative interventions are most useful after an observation or an emotional or reflective intervention (the other two types of intervention). His intervention cube also helps the facilitator to think about where the focus of the intervention is and the intensity. This might be at the whole group, interpersonal or individual level, and can be high, medium or low intensity. As a rough rule of thumb, the 'higher' and broader the focus, the less intense the intervention will be. So making an interpretation at an individual level would most likely be a highly intense intervention. Reddy makes

the point that this would be to prompt the group to discuss, rather than impose a 'truth'. This may be what's needed, but an experienced facilitator would need to have the confidence and skill to work with whatever came out of that. This fits in to the confronting dimension, which we will come back to shortly.

Reddy has a useful distinction about where a facilitator can intervene. He talks about intervening at the task level i.e. on how a group is getting the task done and at a maintenance level or the socio-emotional aspects of a group. Chuck Philips, a long-time collaborator of Reddy, asserts that a facilitator should only intervene on a maintenance level insofar as it is interfering with the group getting the task done. If that task is learning, then the maintenance level may be more or less relevant dependant on the group and the individual client.

Another aspect of Reddy's approach is to make most of the interventions as statements rather than questions. Again, this could be at any level or type e.g. 'the group has been discussing how to organise itself for 15 minutes.' Or 'Jane seems angry at the last comment and has stopped looking at Bill'. The idea is that if a statement is made then the group has a choice whether they respond to it or not. With a question, the attention normally switches to answering the question, and so a dialogue begins between the facilitator and the group. A similar point was made by several of the participants, in that they suggested that new EALD facilitators who had a coaching background had to stop coaching. I.e. stop thinking about the next 'great' question and focus on the here and now.

So how does all this relate to meaning and sense making? Whilst both Schwarz and Reddy have some interesting ways of thinking about intervening, they are both coming at it from a position of power. Whereas Heron and the participants in the research had a more co-operative agenda. Offering observations can be a useful prompt to help a client tune into what might be relevant and to see patterns of behaviour. However, if it is solely the facilitator's choice about what behaviour to pick up then that immediately limits the data from which a client can begin to make sense. This may be appropriate to begin with or if a client is really struggling to understand for themselves what the experience means, but it should not be a default position. As mentioned before, most participants made a point of including the client and the observers when deciding what behaviour to pay attention to

A caveat to that last statement is needed. As mentioned in the knowledge landscape chapter, the stage of development the client is in, could influence the choices a facilitator makes. This is particularly relevant for the meaning dimension. As many authors who are writing in this area describe (Cook-Greuter, 2013; Kegan & Laskow-Lahey, 2009; Torbert, 2004) the stage of development is about how a person makes meaning, how they experience themselves, the world and themselves in that world.

When a facilitator is supporting a group or a particular client to make observations and make sense of those, different tactics may be necessary. The degree to which a client can pay attention to their own internal cues differs with development stage. For example, a client who is predominately at the Expert stage, may need more help in tuning into physical sensations and taking them as valid data. To then be able to link those sensations with emotions may be a stretch too far for some. Especially if emotional defence mechanisms have kicked in. This is where the horses comes into their own. If the client has changed something, however small, and the horse has responded differently to them, or they have seen the horse respond differently to another client, then this 'evidence' can be useful.

## Meaning making and learning

What might be useful here is to give a quick rundown of the different types of learning and meaning making. Illeris makes the distinction between *assimilation* of new data into an old schema of understanding; *accommodation* which implies that an existing schema or pattern of meaning needs to be altered or reconstructed in some way; and *transformational* learning which implies that this type of learning: "…changes the organisation of the learner's self, identity, meaning perspectives…" (Illeris, 2007, p. 89). Whilst it is commonly thought that this type of learning only happens under crisis conditions or 'disorienting dilemmas' (Boydell, 2016), it is becoming a goal of leadership development and may occur more frequently than expected.

In the above example of a client in the expert stage getting 'evidence' from a change in the horse's behaviour, the role of the facilitator may simply be to help the client to accommodate that new information. Or for a client who is on the verge of shifting to a new way of thinking and experiencing themselves, the experience may be transformational. The role of the facilitator is then to support the client, or help the client to find the appropriate support, as they reorient themselves. For those clients who are already at post-conventional stages, they are likely to be able to pay attention for themselves to the somatic and emotional data that working with the horses brings up. For them it may be more a case of helping them assimilate the new information into their existing meaning structures as necessary.

The key to working with these different forms of learning and the processes of meaning making, is being sensitive to what a client can pay attention to and take as valid data. For some it may be as simple as learning to notice their own physical and emotional state and the impact that has on the horse. For others it maybe noticing what habits and patterns they have around self-worth, control, achievement, belonging etc. and how those patterns have played out with the horses. For others, it may be about holding a space for meaning to emerge and supporting insights from the horses to supplement the meaning that can be made. All participants, in one way or another mentioned noticing and helping clients notice their patterns. Where they differed, was what they then did with that data

## Meaning and confronting – the challenge of noticing

Heron links the meaning making dimension with the confronting dimension. His contention is that there are various processes that may make a group resistant to or avoidant of something important. The examples he gives are such things as conflict, authority, control etc. These may be caused by anything from educational alienation to psychology repression or culture oppression. My initial response is to question where these assumptions come from i.e. do these causes exist, or are they relevant in 21st century? In whose opinion do they need to be confronted? I am mindful of the paradigm from which Heron comes, and whilst not dismissive, certainly wanting to take his assertions with a pinch of salt.

He was working at a time that meant the politics of higher education could have been seen as creating or perpetuating a culture of oppression or alienation. However, there has been a lot of work to shift the balance of power, and create greater equality in education. Whether this is through Malcolm Knowles (2005), Paulo Freire (1970) and Ian Cunningham (Cunningham, et al., 2000) amongst others, or whether society has moved on, it no longer seems appropriate to talk about the need for confronting what Heron calls 'resistance and rigidity'.

Where the idea of confronting is still useful is in helping a client to see things they had not seen before, and helping them to take risks, or move out of their comfort zone. I contend that the experience of being with a horse is confronting in and of itself. Just being around a horse can bring

up emotions that had previously been unacknowledged. Horses also will respond in a way that can be quite challenging. I have experienced a horse go from high energy to 'dope on a rope' within 5 minutes of being led by a client. The sharing of observations of the change in the horse's behaviour was highly confronting, but also cathartic. The response was essentially, ' I know I sometimes have that effect on people, I just hadn't realised it was so obvious'. So what might be intended as a simple observation and sharing of information can be taken as confronting. The whole experience is ripe with potential for a client's self-perception to be challenged, whether that is intended or not.

Rather than the slightly loaded term confronting, I prefer to use Trevor Bentley's (2013) term of providing challenge balanced with adequate support. Bentley has a continuum of intervention that ranges from gentle to directive (Bentley, 2000). In creating that balance and helping the client find their learning zone ( 2013 p41) the facilitator needs to pay attention to the perceived levels of risk and shame. We are back to the facilitator's role in maintaining psychological safety. However, what I take from Bentley is that a facilitator can challenge a client very gently and maintain a sufficient degree of support, such that the learning or growth can occur. One of the participants gave a great example of this when very gently asking a question to uncover what was behind a particular move to action. In my experience there is rarely any need for the facilitator to directively challenge a client. The simple act of observation, or a gentle question can be enough. As Bentley says:

"Having the capacity to work anywhere along the facilitation spectrum, and having the awareness of what will support or challenge the group in an appropriate way at any one moment is perhaps one of the key skills of advanced facilitation" (2013, p. 43)

Bentley has an interesting take on deciding where on his spectrum to intervene from, and the first decision is about whether to do something or do nothing. This was echoed by a number of participants and might come under the adage of 'less is more'. He makes the point that even though a facilitator may appear to be doing nothing, their presence has an impact on the group field, and the group will be picking up on subtle cues. He also makes the point that if you are going to challenge the group or an individual the advanced facilitator is prepared for any consequence resulting. In an all human group, the challenge may come from the facilitator, or other group members, in EALD it is likely to come from the horse too.

Whilst a response to a challenge by the facilitator can be unpredictable, the response to a challenge from a horse is likely to be even more so. This adds another level of preparedness to the already advanced level needed to work in this way. The participants talked about taking their lead from the horse and simply drawing the client's attention to what was happening, or not happening, with the horse. This was often enough to provide the challenge need for learning to occur.

### Presence as Intervention

Bentley is working from a Gestalt perspective, so being in the moment, in good contact with the self, other and environment in the here and now are underlying principles. This perspective seems to be particularly apt for working with horses in an embodied way. What I find particularly useful is the way he talks about the self as instrument, with instrument relating to 'tuning in', or being sensitive to vibrations. Also, as talking about the facilitator's presence as being a form of intervention. This was echoed by a number of participants who mentioned how they prepared for being present with a client and some of the practices they had to maintain their preparedness and their instrumentality.

Bentley talks about the inner, middle and outer awareness of the facilitator as sounding simple, but in fact being very demanding. So the inner awareness is concerned with emotions but also physical sensations; the middle is concerned with thoughts, curiosity, imaginings etc.; and the outer is

awareness of what the facilitator is noticing in the world outside their skin. This was a large part of the findings, i.e. the heightened levels of awareness and where attention is at any given moment. On one level it may seem that the horse is just part of the outer awareness, but one of the participants talked about the horse as resonating and perhaps amplifying the signals one might pick up from a client. This is perhaps beyond the scope of this research, but the ideas of emotional entrainment and mirror neurons across the species barrier might be a fascinating avenue. However, in practice, the horse is an additional source of data for the facilitator to be aware of. I can only surmise that the familiarity of the facilitator with horse behaviour contributes to being able to first pick up on and then make sense of that information.

### *Structuring*

This is the final area that Heron describes which I am going to explore. I will link it to the role of facilitator in learning and how a session is structured to ensure that the elements of experiential learning are covered.

There is another dimension, that of valuing. However, I am not going to take that as a separate discussion point as it is implicit and pervasive in how all the participants described how they worked with their clients. For me this is linked to both creating safety and being beyond ego. Valuing is about respect for the client as a whole person and demonstrating that consistently.

#### STRUCTURING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

In the knowledge landscape, I covered several aspects of experiential learning, in particular what the elements of an experiential cycle or hierarchy might be. The emphasis at the time was to critique the pervasive model of David Kolb and to look at alternatives. Despite the fact there are more and more critiques of the model, it is still present in the language of practitioners and some EALD facilitation skills programmes are still built around the core ideas. However, what is becoming more apparent is that, even if the language may be the same, the practice has shifted. Or perhaps more accurately, the practice has already been adapted and is in fact more in line with academic thinking in the area than first appeared.

Most of the participants in the research followed a similar pattern in terms of how they structured the activities. This normally went something like:

- Help the clients to arrive mentally as well as physically and start tuning in to their own felt sense
- Have an experience where the response of the horse was the catalyst for feedback aimed at raising awareness of self, other or environment
- Debrief by way of simple, open questions to help connect back to other experiences if necessary
- Have further experiences where different things could be tried out, deepening the awareness of self and others and a sense of agency i.e. if I do something different I get a different response.

So the structures are very simple, but there was a sense of order or flow, that built from beginning to end. However, there were smaller, micro-structures that sat within the overall design of the day. This might be the structure of the debrief, or how a client was supported to experiment and try something different.

## LEARNING

I just want to pause and delve into the literature about learning to get a sense of what it is, as I think it can be all too easy to make assumptions that it is one construct that everyone understands. It

strikes me that there are a number of ways I have referred to learning already. For example, making a distinction between learning and development, or talking about the three types of learning that Illeris described (Op.Cit) i.e. assimilation, accommodation and transformation. There is a growing number of articles that refer to horizontal or vertical development which is often linked to transformational learning (Spence & McDonald, 2015) (Kitchenham, 2008; Illeris, 2014).

There is also the neuroscience of learning (Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015). This is where learning is characterised as a dynamic process that incorporates perception, attention, affect and memory formation. The authors suggest some particular approaches that support the neurobiology of learning. For example, particularly in novel situations, a learner may not know what the salient information is that they need to pay attention to. So a facilitator of learning may want to consider priming (e.g. asking a client to observe body language in another to help them pay attention to their own), goal setting to focus attention and create personal salience, and framing the experience to help the learner pay attention and extract salient data e.g. this is a safe place to experiment. This is then followed by debriefing with guided reflection to catch the data the learner might have missed in the moment. They also suggest additional steps, to include pausing to allow for a memory of an event to stabilise neurologically; bridge building which is connections with previous knowledge and extended to new situations; and assimilation where a learner chooses how to incorporate the learning into their repertoire.

None of that is rocket science, and most facilitators would most likely follow something similar. Though I do want to highlight a few things that came out in the research. Firstly, that in adult learning situations, the goal is normally set by the client. Indeed two of the participants were explicit about this. A number also talked about framing the learning co-operatively, particularly around the topic of leadership or leading complexity. Most also talked about how they variously supported the debriefing, which was getting the data from the experience, as well as the bridge-building and the relevance to work. What is important is the mention here of the pause.

This was experienced differently, but the point that learning does not always land immediately and that it may take hours, days or weeks before an insight could be available for processing. It seems the research participants are echoing something at Schenck and Cruickshank are noting the neurological basis for. There was also a debate about the degree to which a facilitator should intervene in the sense making process. The authors suggest that greater learning occurs when a learner is supported. This was linked to the Zone of Proximal Development: "…guidance and processing are usually necessary for examining multiple facets of the experience and for creating intentional connections to other concepts." (p83)

One note of caution here is that Schenck is talking about a Dynamic *Skill* Theory. Most of the work described by the participants was less about the skills of leadership and more about the awareness of self, the lived experience of 'me as I am leading'. There is an acknowledgment of learning as "…embodied, enculturated, contextual, conscious as well as non-conscious, developmentally dependant and dynamic." (p82). However, I do not want to extrapolate from the neuroscience of skills based learning to make claims about more personal awareness raising learning. However, some of the additions and distinctions they make are worth considering. E.g. debriefing being about supporting the extraction of all salient information and bridge-building and assimilation as related by distinct stages.

However, I do want to note that many of the participants were coming from a more holistic and humanistic perspective on learning. Learning as including the whole human being, their hopes, fears,

emotional, spiritual, authentic selves, not just a cognitive, rational process of information gathering or purely 'scientific' experimentation.

Heron might say that most people are so conditioned to ignore anything other than the conceptual and cognitive aspects of our experience. Whereas feeling is what helps us experience ourselves as a 'self' (see Damasio). However, the feeling dimension may be unavailable or at best unpleasant because that is where insecurities and the emotions associated with, often unmet, ego desires also sit. As a facilitator, being able to help someone get in touch with and contend with what that means for them in the moment is a vital part of creating an experience of safety. As was mentioned above, learning cannot happen without safety. All of the participants in one way or another described ways that they helped their clients to get in touch with the direct experience of working with the horses. What was different were the ways in which they helped them process this experience.

### Context of Learning

I want to pull the focus out slightly at this point and connect back to the context within which this learning is happening. Most clients are coming to EALD as part of an organisationally sponsored programme with the explicit assumption that something relevant to their development as leaders will be learnt. It is one thing to have awareness raised and to have an immersive experience. However, it does need to be relevant and to a degree needs to be socialised. Or at the very least in a place where the individual learner can access the learning and apply it back in the work place, even if talking about the learning is more difficult.

## EXPERIENCE

This was a consistent feature of the finding, that of drawing on years of experience and in different domains. Whether the participants in the research had qualifications such as NLP coaching practitioners, Masters degrees in Occupational Psychology or Doctorates in Education, they all had significant experience of developing leaders prior to introducing working with horses as a method. Their inclusion in this study was done on the basis of that experience and qualification as well as their reputation in the field. Whilst the ability to articulate their process of facilitation explicitly varied, intuition was not actually mentioned as often as I might have assumed. However, what was described, particularly through the second interviews with video as a prompt, did accord with some of what was covered in the knowledge landscape chapter.

## INTUITION

A number of the participants described gathering data and waiting for it to make sense which was similar to the ideas of holistic intuition (Pretz, 2014). This was also linked with affective intuition, but as an awareness of somatic responses as an additional source of data rather than the simplistic having a good or bad feeling about something. This did accord with Sadler-Smith's definition (2016) in that intuitions could manifest somatically or cognitively and were informed by prior experience. However, what seemed important to me in the findings was the emphasis that intuitions, if they were even termed as such, were only ever part of the picture. And they were always offered tentatively. Even these highly experienced practitioners did not rely on their intuition, even though it might have been 'right'. One participant in particular mentioned that even if his intuition was spot on, if the client was not ready to learn it, then the respect for that person and what was right for them at that time superseded any need to be right.

What was clear was that intuition was only ever a small part of how a facilitator thought about what was going on for a client and a horse. They used all of their experience, both prior to and in the moment, to skilfully navigate the tensions and choices, using discernment and expert decision

making to guide their actions. Knowledge, skill and experience as well as presence, in the moment awareness and compassion were used to make artful choices in service of the learner and the learning.

## INFLUENCE OF THEORY OF LEADERSHIP

One aspect of the literature that perhaps needs more attention is the assumptions made about what leadership development looks like in the 21st Century. One participant in particular was explicit about their theory of leadership and what needed to be development in leaders in order to respond effectively. This was based on Ralph Stacey's (2010) ideas around chaos and complexity in organisations and uses the observed behaviours of horses as inspiration for leadership behaviours.

There is growing interest in how the state of being of a leader has an influence on what data they can pay attention to and how that might guide their actions. "… how our present state – the way we are in this particular moment in an embodied, sensual way – can potentially help us access to wider ways of knowing as an additional resource in navigating complexity." (Sell, 2017, p. 244). Sell also describes, in somatic terms her own experience of what it feels like to not be connected and the impact that has on her problem-solving and relational skills. Interestingly she also refers to the numerous developmental theories such as Torbert, Kegan etc (Op.Cit)and how their view of leadership is to "… shift the focus from traits and skills to the underlying inner system (often referred to as our level of consciousness), which determines the lens through which we relate to the world and the scope of action that results from it."p247

Other, perhaps more implicit theories of leadership were around the elements of the emotionally intelligent or authentic leader. Both of which place emphasis on self-awareness amongst other things. "…authentic leaders are described as being self-aware, showing openness and clarity regarding who they are, and consistently disclosing and acting in accordance with their personal values, beliefs, motives, and sentiments" (Banks, et al., 2016, p. 635). However, this self-awareness is not always easy to develop, and there is increasing acceptance that this is not just a cognitive endeavour.

William Brendel and Carmela Bennett cite many such sources when they assert that the cognitive focus of much leadership development is no longer sufficient to support the effective functioning of leaders in complex environments. Their emphasis is on how the related fields of mindfulness and somatics can be employed to develop in the moment awareness. They call this simply 'Embodied Leadership Development'. "Through this holistic approach, leaders learn how to expand awareness to receive real-time insights, critically reflect upon these insights to inform new actions and behaviours, and transform their way of being so that it grows their authentic capacity and is better aligned with their needs and intentions." (2016, p. 410)

Tomkins and Nicholds also describe a connection between awareness, regulation and identity in relationship with others when discussing authentic leadership. "Thus, critical reflections on AL continue to see authenticity as 'tethered' to issues of identity, but these are viewed as intersubjective and fluid, rather than solipsistic or static." (2017, p. 257). Many of the participants focused much of what they did on developing the elements of authenticity, particularly self-awareness and a sense of what one called your 'I AM', or identity. What was not clear was whether this was done from a deliberate attempt to increase authenticity as a leadership trait, or a belief that greater self-awareness was an inherently positive thing.

How EALD is positioned in the world of leadership development is perhaps becoming more important. If practitioners can connect this inherently embodied approach to the emerging trends

within leadership development, this can only serve to improve the perception of this powerful method. This thread will be picked up in more depth in the next chapter, on impact and implications of this research.

## SUMMARY

- What the first part of this chapter has done is to demonstrate that the practice of facilitating leadership development with horses is indeed connected in the most part to established bodies of knowledge. These include advanced facilitation, modern adult learning theories and leadership development. This is an important step in establishing the credibility of this approach. It does not require the establishment of a new theory to explain the underpinnings of this way of working. However, what it also demonstrates is the need to connect some of those different but overlapping bodies of knowledge. In particular where the skills of facilitation and facilitator presence overlaps with the principles of embodied, experiential learning in a leadership context. To take a facilitator's perspective on all of this, and explore what that means in practice, with leadership clients, is unique. This fulfils the second aim of this research and meets the objectives of:
- Get clarity on what underpins the practice of EALD from different experienced practitioners
- Articulate the bodies of knowledge they are drawing from
- Look at the similarities and differences between the practice of EALD and existing theory and practice of facilitating experiential learning with leaders.
- By articulating what common underpinnings and differences in application there are, that less experienced practitioners could appreciate the depth of knowledge and skill that is involved.
- To provide a window on the complexity that sits underneath the apparent simplicity of this practice.

## SYNTHESIS

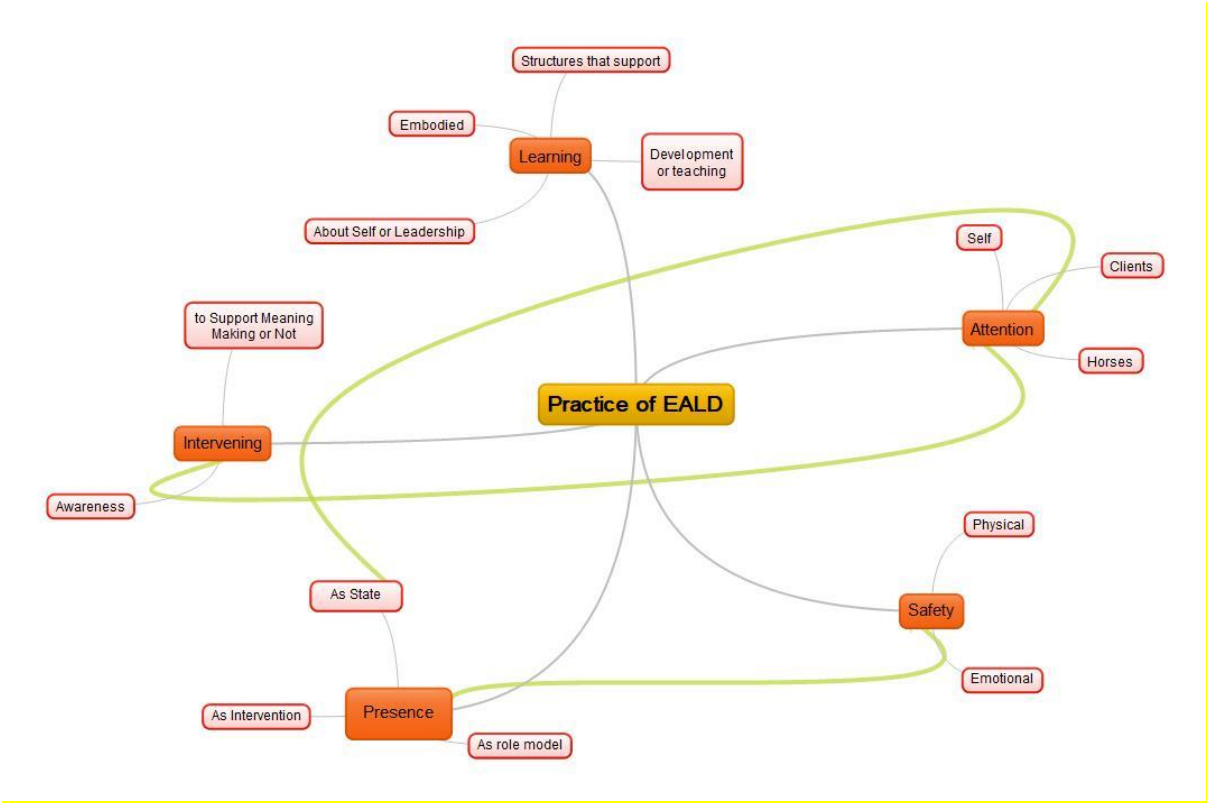



Figure 6: Synthesis of key findings

This section creates the basis for a curriculum development and provides a synthesis of the data from the research. For the experienced practitioner it is a reflective tool and the basis for a generative conversation within a community of practice. This speaks to the third aim of the research which is to create a generative conversation about the practice of EALD and to support the development of practitioners, specifically:

- To provide clear guidance for those practitioners who believe working with horses makes them pioneers and as such do not need to refer to other bodies of knowledge or sources of data.
- Support the development of other practitioners
- Support the credibility of the approach.

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE PAID PARTICULAR ATTENTION ?

### Presence

the state from which a facilitator is operating is central. This is much more about how you are than what you do. The present facilitator is able to embody their own authentic presence and works emergently with what comes up, whether that is in the client, the horse or the group. This is often on a somatic, felt level and requires the facilitator to be aware and in good contact with their own thoughts, feelings and perceptions as well as with what is happening around them.

The facilitator is present in the here and now; open as well as with and for the client. They are operating congruently from this state of presence and as such role model what it means to be present and authentic for their clients This level of presence requires on-going work and a reflective practice, both in the moment and in reflection. This may be in formal supervision or with peers. They

also know how to develop their knowledge and skills as well as looking after themselves physically in order to maintain their instrumentality.

This presence allows the facilitator to combine their experience and intuitions, to have technical knowing and in the moment doing. They float on an ocean of knowledge and can dip into it as needed. Having that experience to draw on supports them in being in service of the client as it means they can sit more comfortably with productive uncertainty. The present facilitator has gone beyond their own ego needs and can give a depth of quality attention; creating a sense of safety for their clients.

## Safety

EALD facilitators are conscious of both physical and emotional safety. They can hold an unobtrusive presence to create a safe place for clients to explore and discover for themselves. They don't impose their perspectives or force understanding the client is not ready for. They can create enough safety for risks to be taken. An effective EALD facilitator creates explicit contracts, but also support clients to take responsibility for themselves. They normalise emotions as data and allow catharsis and other positive emotional processes as needed. The facilitator can recognise unhelpful emotional processes and have the skills to help the client shift those. They manage the dilemma of structure to create safety and openness to what emerges. Their presence and quality of attention is part of what creates that safety

An effective EALD facilitator needs to be adept at creating and holding a psychologically safe space through:

- Presence
- Quality of attention
- Confidentiality
- Non-judgemental through well-developed self-awareness
- Creating a learning or discovery mindset (no success or failure)
- Ability to work with whatever emerged from the horse-human interaction

## Attention

EALD facilitators are paying attention on at least 3 parallel tracks: of self, horse and client and making meaning for themselves, and how they choose if to or how to intervene. They take the horse as primary source of data, and follow their cues in order better understand what might be happening for the client. The EALD facilitator is also adept at process their own internal and external data without losing presence and quality of attention. This includes being aware of how their own judgements, history and projections may be impacting them in the moment and on reflection. The EALD facilitator can draw a client's attention to internal and external data as a means to intervene.

## Intervening

EALD facilitators have a clear purpose, which is to intervene in order to help a client raise their awareness by keeping the experience with the feedback from the horse, and in the here and now. They encourage clients to pay attention to the data in their own bodies, using emotions as data; as well as seeing the data that is displayed in the mirror of the horse's body. They understand the different dimensions of intervening and can use any of them in service of the learning for the client knowing too that their presence is also an intervention. The simplicity of using an observation as an

intervention sits on the far side of the complex cognitive, emotional and somatic processes they are paying attention.

The EALD facilitator understands that how an experiential day with the horses is framed within its organisational context and other learning interventions is important. They are skilled at influencing the emotional life of the group and understand the importance of physical sensations as ways into emotional processes. The effective EALD facilitator can help individuals and groups find positive emotional processes as well as recognise defence mechanisms; supporting clients compassionately. They understand that an observation, drawing a client's attention to the horse's behaviour can be hugely challenging and needs to be balanced with adequate support. Equally they are aware of power dynamic between facilitator and learners, and are careful not to privilege the facilitator's voice. They see themselves as an equal partner and support the client to take personal responsibility for their own learning, and actively involve observers too

## Learning

An EALD facilitator may have different positions on what they are trying to support i.e. awareness raising or developing particular capabilities. But there needs to be a deep understanding that learning is not just about 'knowing that' and 'knowing how'. They understand that learning and developing are not necessarily the same thing and can support both processes.

The understanding of learning on an embodied level is key: learning is not just a cognitive process, it happens in the body too. For the learning with horses to deliver on it is potential, an EALD facilitator needs to be able to support clients with different levels of awareness and understanding, to pay attention to and make sense of the data from their own bodies even if that may not be amenable to articulation there and then. EALD is different to other forms of experiential learning in that there is an active avoidance of too many concepts or abstract theorizing.

The EALD facilitator also knows how to structure an experience to maximise the learning. Learning happens when there is sufficient safety to take risks. These risks are aimed at creating a learning experience, not just an experience. Otherwise it is 'just having a nice time with horses'. A EALD facilitator knows that they may have to scaffold a client's awareness as they won't always know what data is relevant, or what to pay attention to. They can help clients create focus with their own goals, and build bridges to past and future situations. But they also know that a client is a whole person, with hopes, fears, aspirations and purpose. A EALD facilitator understands that different clients will have different ways of making their own meaning and can adapt to work with where they are, not where they'd like them to be.

An effective EALD facilitator is well versed in 21st century leadership ideas and know the power of the experience with a horse to create awareness, develop authenticity and to embody the qualities of a leader. They pay attention to where in a leadership development programme this experiential element may sit, ensuring that support is available to help process the learning after the time with the horses.

## CONCLUSION

What I have described here are truly advanced facilitation skills. Whilst it may seem an anti-climax that much of the practice of EALD has its roots in established theory and practice, this actually places this emerging field on solid ground. The practice of EALD is supported by a sophisticated set of skills, theories and experience. For those who believe that they are pioneering this approach must first look to established theory and practice in the facilitation of experiential adult development. From that point they can add in the particular abilities and subtle nuances described above.

What makes EALD different is the importance of the facilitators presence coupled with their facility with paying attention to and process data from a variety of sources. These practitioners have well developed observational skills that encompass not only their own inner awareness, but also their clients, the observing group and the horses. The level of sophistication in supporting clients to make meaning from their experiences with the horses is considerable.

# CHAPTER SIX: IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS

## Overview

This chapter will explore the contribution to professional knowledge impact that this research has had, and will have on a personal and wider professional practice. I will discuss the ways that I can influence how EALD is practiced and how it is viewed as a method for developing leaders.

## CONTRIBUTION TO PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The research would suggest that practice in EALD is largely built on practice in facilitation of experiential learning for leadership development. Three interrelated areas, all of which are well established. This means that as facilitators of EALD, we are not pioneers and a solid grounding in existing good practice is a must. However, not one body of literature, model or writer has all the answers. There are things that are unique to working with horses, particularly the issue of working with data from a sentient being who you cannot ask "so what did you mean by that?". The facilitator is paying attention to data from the horse, a non-human sentient other, whose only source of communication is through body language. The embodied, somatic nature of that communication is one of the reasons that this method can go deep, quickly. It can by-pass the verbal sense-making and can goes into the realm of sensations, feelings and emotions, simply because of the somatic nature of the work.

There has been only a limited number of contributions to research in the professional area of facilitation of experiential leadership development. Whilst this study focuses specifically on a niche area of that field, i.e. working with the natural responses of horses to give leaders developmental feedback, its implications for the practice of facilitation go wider than that. To codify those aspects of both what a facilitator does and how they need to be when working in an experiential and embodied way has utility for many professional developers. The findings from this study set out clearly what needs to be paid attention when working experientially. It also explores the impact of different theories of learning and leadership how the advanced facilitation skills are applied. It cogently draws together three interrelated fields and presents principles of application that can guide and support the practice of professional developers irrespective of whether they are working with horses or not.

## THE IMPACT ON MY EAL PRACTICE

I remember when I first came across the idea of using horses to support leadership development. I was already an occupational psychologist with 12 years' experience of developing people. And even though the taster session I experienced was basic and 'facilitation by numbers', I could still see the potential. I went through a phase of seeking out different approaches to developing specific EAL skills and each time came away both disappointed and feeling underprepared. It was almost as if my existing skill set was insufficient and that there had to be more to facilitating this way of developing people. This wasn't just that most of the training out there was coming from a therapeutic perspective. The emphasis, even in leadership focused programmes was predominantly learning a set of exercises, expecting facilitation skills to already be present. This also had the element of learning about yourself as a facilitator in the doing of those exercises. But even so, with all my experience, knowledge and skills, I still felt nervous.

In the beginning, some of this nervousness was about knowing that the work with the horse could go anywhere at any time, and that this was at the edge of my practice. Another, perhaps larger part of the nervousness, was that it mattered to me that clients had a 'good' experience of this method.

When I first became aware that this approach was something that combined two of my great passions, learning and horses, I became attached to proving the method was special. The nerves were about not wanting to do it wrong, to not do justice to the power of it. I also realised that I was taking other people's perspectives on what it was and what it could be used for. I had not yet found my voice, my approach.

In the beginning and for quite a long time, my practice of EALD was heavily focused on what the horse was offering. In fact for a while I described my role as translator rather than facilitator. I saw my role as simply being there to help a client see what the horse was trying to tell them. However, as part of this research I have (re)gained an appreciation for the role of the facilitator in holding a space, with presence, within which learning from the horses can occur. What looks passive is in fact incredibly active. That presence and working with what emerges, a balance of stillness and active alertness; thoughts, sensations, impressions, choices, intuitions all flowing, sometimes quite rapidly, within a frame of stillness. I have come to accept this flow and the container of stillness and now enjoy this much more. Previously I had anxiety about not wanting to miss anything, not wanting to lose a moment, or an opportunity to intervene or support. Whereas now, that acceptance actually enhances the sense of flow and the lack of anxiety means I have more attentional capacity and actually notice more. My respect for and trust in the horses has only deepened as I have learnt to spot their subtle cues. The more I trust that they will be responding to something, and follow where they lead, the more powerful the work. My skill of observing the somatic has developed with humans too. By simply observing and asking a question, that somatic awareness is built in my clients as well as in me.

## THE INFLUENCE ON MY WIDER PRACTICE

This has fed into the other work that I do with groups of leaders, but also in my coaching practice. I notice the flow of experience more easily and am able to choose responses more skilfully. That includes choosing to do nothing. I have become more aware of the potentially different types of data that clients can pay attention to and recognise as valid. The noticing of myself and my being in the moment, my presence has also developed considerably. This is not just through the work with the horses, but knowing that presence is key has been a strong motivator in developing my meditation and other self-care practices.

I have a greater appreciation of what all my years of practice has given me. All those 'miles on the clock' mean that I have thousands of hours' worth of experience to draw on. What that enables me to do in any facilitation situation is trust that there will be something useful in my kit bag. That does not mean to say that I do not plan, but that the anxiety of the unknown is much less significant now. In fact I plan more to allow the space for the unknown to show up. I also focus my designs more explicitly around experiential learning principles, with vertical development in mind whenever appropriate.

It has also fed into the way I describe what I do, and how I position EALD to clients. I position it as experiential learning, and how that needs to be facilitated, and it happens to involve horses. I am more comfortable 'selling' the benefits of EALD as an experiential method that has unsocially mediated feedback. My love of horses, my strongly purpose lead attachment to the power of the method does not come into it any more. Whilst that is still there, the connections I have found in the research and literature to well established approaches to the facilitation of experiential learning for leaders bolsters my confidence. I no longer pitch it as being about the horses, it is just good, experiential learning. And the credentials of that are well established. However, it still needs to be facilitated well, like any other method.

## MY INFLUENCE AS A PRACTITIONER

I have appreciated that my position as a senior consultant at an institute such as Roffey Park has given me a unique advantage. The strong research base and academic rigour which is part of Roffey Park's reputation is reflected on to me as an advocate of this approach to leadership development. That reputation and this research study lends credibility to this field. So that fact that I am a senior member of the Roffey Park team who is well connected means that I am able to influence from this position. We also have a reputation for developing other practitioners, and as clients have said, they would not consider coming anywhere else to develop facilitation skills. As such I am one of the team who regularly run an advanced facilitation skills programme called The Art of Facilitation.

## DEVELOPING PRACTITIONERS

My experience of developing practitioners (e.g. HRBP's or OD) is that often when the intervention is a short workshop there is an emphasis on tools and techniques. They want quick fixes and ways to 'do', but the real difference comes when they explore who they are when they are 'doing'. There is often underlying confidence issues and the anxiety is often dealt with by having things to hold on to. This is not to say that tools and techniques are not helpful, but the idea of self as instrument is central in our philosophy. Even in well designed, experiential development of HRBPs, OD professionals and facilitators, the typical three day workshop can only ever scratch the surface of the practitioner and their instrumentality. These are learning or training programmes rather than true development, however advanced the subject matter.

The M.Sc. in People and Organisation Development and longer, Post Graduate Certificates (PG Cert), give the time, critical thinking skills and challenge needed to create the opportunity for genuine development to happen. For many facilitators this may need to be a transformational learning experience, their instrumentality and presence are to be developed sufficiently. It may be that they have to examine their beliefs, assumptions, identity and ways of making meaning. It may be that they have to work on developing their authentic presence, so that they can create, hold and be a part of a safe space for clients. What they cannot be is a substitute for experience.

One question might be whether that experience is as a trainer or a developer? One way of thinking about it is that the way a programme of EALD is marketed and sold would need to be clear that it was a training programme if that was the only experience the facilitator had. However, the problem with that is, even if the intent was just for it to be training on emotional intelligence or leading from an equine perspective, the potential for it to go much deeper is always present. Whilst it may seem harsh, given the findings from this study, if a person does not have the skills and experience to handle whatever comes up, then they should not be doing EALD. If psychological safety cannot be assured, then the risks are too great, and the reputational damage to the method not warranted.

Perhaps one way around this is, if someone does not have experience as a developer, then they need to get experience of developing people with someone who is. Even if this is second or third handing a programme that does not involve horses. Working with horses as a development method is far too complex, dynamic and unpredictable to be learning one's craft on. At the very least, if the experience is as a trainer or solutions focused coach, then the need to work alongside an experienced developer when working with horses to adapt skillset and mindset, is essential.

What also has come out of the research is that there is a need to have a working understanding of adult learning, experiential learning and approaches to leadership development, ideally including vertical development. This actually encompasses a broad range of methods and models. The participants in the study did not all share the same models and approaches. The important fact was that they all had an underpinning in those areas of some sort. They all had principles and ways of

working that had their foundations in some established body of knowledge. EALD is a method for supporting leaders to learn, but the method itself needs to be used skilfully otherwise it is doing clients and the horses a disservice.

## Developing EALD Practitioners

In order to support the professionalisation of this method of leadership development. I am proposing to revive the Post Graduate Certificate in Facilitation that we have accredited through the University of Sussex. This would follow the principles of self-managed learning of our other qualifications. This includes mapping the field of facilitation, with the group then choosing which areas it would like to focus on. Each person would also choose their own learning goals and how they want to evidence that. The goals have to include a form practice and application as well as demonstrating Master's standard critical reflection, self-awareness and academic rigour. As with our coaching qualification, it would require a set number of hours practice under supervision. The work is assessed by the student, their peers in a learning set and the set advisor who's role it is to ensure Master's standard throughout. My proposal is to offer this as a general qualification in facilitation with a special interest in EALD. The grounding of facilitation practice needs to be established first, before adding in the work with the horses.

However, I do not want this to be the only approach. It may be that many would be practitioners cannot afford to spend the time and money required of this level of practice. I am speaking at a practitioner conference in June 2018 when I will set out my findings. I want that to be an opportunity to invite a bigger conversation about the professionalisation of this specialist branch of facilitation. My intent has not been to create another orthodoxy that competes with the likes of EAGALA, Epona, Horse Dreams and other methods. If my research has shown anything, it is that there are many ways to do this work well, but they are all underpinned by broad principles that give the work integrity. If I can be successful in dissemination of those principles and invite practitioners to explore how they can be incorporated in their approach that will be a start.

One approach for generating this conversation was discussed with one of the research participants after the use of the video to deepen the exploration of their practice. They mentioned that it had been extremely useful to watch themselves and the horses, and to recall the choices that they had made. It brought back to mind the internal processes that had been happening in the session. The suggestion was made that a video could be used in an online environment. Without sound, participants in a webinar could observe and then discuss what they had seen, what choices they might have had, how they may have proceeded. With this facilitated by an experienced practitioner, underlying principles and models could be introduced as well as generating reflective and reflexive practice.

This idea does have issues with data protection, confidentiality, production values etc., before it can be considered viable. However, it is one idea already discussed with the research participants who are exemplars of this work. My intention is also to go back to each of the participants with copies of the findings and to ask for their ideas on how to further disseminate this research and support the development of practice. Another idea already suggested is that Roffey Park could host a think tank that has a focus on EALD. This would develop a research agenda to promote both the work and the development of its practitioners. For example, one topic already considered is the barriers to purchasing this as a method of development.

Other approaches could include papers in related academic journals. This may be useful from a credibility perspective, but is unlikely to reach my target audience. It is more likely that additions to my already published blog posts on the topics of facilitation, embodied leadership development and

the development of leadership presence through EALD would be more beneficial. They are currently on both the Roffey website as well as LinkedIn. I have had one article published in HR magazine that made the top ten most read list, which was what horses could teach us about leadership. My plan is to put more research based thought pieces out in social media. I will also put proposals to speak at L&D conferences to improve the visibility and credibility of this approach to development.

### DEVELOPING THE FIELD OF EALD

There is a growing interest in leadership development that focuses on the whole leader, not just the cognitive elements of leadership. As mentioned in the discussion, leadership development that creates sustainable shifts in thinking, feeling and behaving is becoming more pressing. The number of clients that want something 'different' 'new', 'innovative' is growing. What they are all seeking is something that makes a difference, and actually does help leaders lead better. Often this is linked to needing to help leaders lead better in complexity and ambiguity; or needing to lead with more emotional intelligence so as to engage and empower others; or to develop the presence to influence a wide range of stakeholders more effectively. This may be transformational learning, or it may simply be learning within a current frame, but that is more integrated. However, there are still quizzical looks when working with horses is mentioned.

My plan is to promote this research as a way to increase the credibility of the whole field. If buyers can see that EALD is a valid experiential learning method and that the key to its usefulness is that it is facilitated well then this should support the professionalisation of the field. Any experiential learning stands or falls on how it is facilitated. If you are taking a risk on doing something different, then making sure those who are delivering it know what they are talking about it is vital.

## LIMITS OF THIS STUDY AND FURTHER RESEARCH

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the main limit of this research is the relatively small number of exemplars who have enough experience to be credible participants. However, the depth and richness of the data from those highly experienced practitioners means that the findings are still robust. With such a specialist area of facilitation of experiential leadership development, this was always going to be the case. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is particularly useful for getting a clearer understanding of how the facilitators experience themselves as they practice EALD, however it does not look at the efficacy of that method. Only anecdotal evidence and the stipulation that they had to have repeat business from clients gave any indication of how effective they were.

One potential study could connect the skill and experience of the facilitator with the efficacy of the EALD method. It is very difficult to determine whether a particular approach to leadership development is effective, if the quality of the input i.e. the facilitation, is not factored in and measured in some way. Another direct build from this research would be to design a study that looked at the applicability of the findings here and see if they had relevance for the facilitation of other leadership development approaches.

# CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTIONS

This final chapter is an opportunity for me to reflect on the experience of engaging in this research. This is both to critique the study itself, its strengths and limitations, but also to reflect on what it has meant for me personally and professionally.

## LEARNING TO BE A RESEARCHER

I have had my own experience of learning whilst doing in designing and conducting this research. It has changed a little now, but I spent the first two to three years learning how to do research on my own. In some instances I was literally holding the manual in one hand and using it to work with a transcript in the other. Whilst it was a painful and somewhat laborious approach, it gave me immediate, practical experience of using what I was learning. I found that in the doing, I got a deeper understanding of things, such as methodology and epistemology, that I thought I'd understood in my project planning phase. I am now much more confident in my understanding of the choices I made about how to go about answering my question. I am confident that any further research I conduct will be based on a solid understanding of the principles and practice of methods and methodologies.

### THE STUDY

The choice to work with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), was probably not the easiest method to start with. Yes, there is a strong underpinning philosophy from which the methodology and methods arise. However, the inherently loose construing is both a strength and a weakness. It can be liberating in terms of an invitation to explore and question within boundaries of method. However, the experience of not having confidence in whether my interpretations of the phenomena as described by my research participants was 'right'/'accurate'/'skewed'/'missing something obvious' (the list could go on), was disconcerting at times to say the least. Perhaps it is intentionally so, to allow for the creative tension, or fertile void. The experience was frustrating, even painful at times, with a sense of meaning and coherence only emerging after many months of working and sitting with the data. All the while, personal doubts of whether I was 'doing it right' nagged. This is where supervision from a seasoned researcher was invaluable.

What IPA did give me was a way to work with a relatively small sample size and to generate rich data from these highly experienced practitioners. It is disappointing that there aren't more experienced practitioners in the UK. However, as part of getting the findings out, I am starting to make contact with a few more. I am slightly wary though, as I am well aware that just because someone talks knowledgably Does not mean that their practice will match their rhetoric. IPA has allowed me to work with what was available, but a bigger sample size might have enabled me to work in a different way. Perhaps, as more experienced L&D practitioners are choosing to include EALD into their work, a further study could be done to develop the themes and test out how prevalent and relevant they are.

### PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL REFLECTIONS

To study anything for 5 years requires the researcher to either be extremely tenacious, or to truly love their subject; in practice, it is both. This is especially so when also continuing to work full time as a developer and practice the art that is facilitation. I would not have embarked on this endeavour had working in this way, with horses, not been both dear to me personally and important professionally. I bring all of who I am when I am facilitating, and to bring my love of horses into that professional arena is fulfilling on a number of levels.

I have been a psychologist and leadership developer for over 20 years now, and I have never worked with a method that gets to the heart of a leader's learning edge so quickly. I have also never worked

with a method of developing people that demands so much of me. It requires me to bring all of my knowledge and experience, but it also challenges me to bring all of my presence, sensitivity, awareness, courage and compassion. When I am working in this way, I really am at the edge of my practice. So to have the privilege of spending 5 years immersing myself in truly understanding this approach has been challenging and rewarding in equal measure.

My practice has developed in many ways, not just when working in partnership with horses. It has deepened my understanding of what has underpinned my practice as well as giving me fruitful new avenues to explore. I take the presence and greater awareness I have developed into every client engagement. The wider knowledge of learning and the current thinking around embodied, experiential and transformational approaches has led to a much greater appreciation of how I can support all of my clients to get the sustained and sustainable behavioural changes they are looking for. I believe it has made me a more rounded and credible practitioner and consultant.

On a personal level, horses have been foundational to my life ever since I can remember. They have featured heavily in my childhood and adult life, as a source of joy, escape, solace and growth. Through the support and contact that they have provided, I have come to terms with difficulties, de-stressed and learnt to connect to myself and to them on somatic, emotional and spiritual levels.

The relationship that I have developed, particularly with my horse, Cherry, has been fundamental to how I experience myself. The deep and simple joy of getting paid to work with and hang out with my best friend and soulmate has been valuable beyond measure. He is a little too old now to always come out and play when I have clients, but he is still my inspiration. I have had the privilege to witness his gentle and magnificent presence be a catalyst for many leaders' learning. He is my 'gentle giant' who has allowed clients to acknowledge their fear and experience that alongside wonder and connection. His physical warmth, strength, power, softness and calmness have enabled clients to experience contrasting emotions in a way that was safe and contained with a simple exchange; a gentle, curious reaching out with his muzzle, allowing a simple stroke of his neck in return. Without this work, I doubt whether I would have developed my own self-awareness and presence to be able to see and connect with him in this way. My new horse, Farley, is stepping in and showing great sensitivity in the work with leaders.

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# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A

## Core questions

My first attempt at beginning to define what my main question is started with " What impact does having a third party involved have on the facilitation of experiential learning when the third party is a horse?" The sub questions that came out of that were based around 3 key areas:

4) What are the core elements of good facilitation?
5) What other third parties could we learn from?
6) What is the impact of a non-human third party?

1. The additional questions that came from core elements of good facilitation were:
    a. What impact does the facilitator's self-awareness or developmental level have?
    b. What is the role of awareness and intuition in this context?
    c. If in any interaction there is an element of content, procedure and process ( (Schein, 1999), how does a good facilitator pay attention at all levels, but particularly when it comes to making sense of what happens at the process level?
    d. Where on Heron's facilitation scale/intervention matrix does this kind of experiential learning best sit? Hierarchical structuring of procedure and autonomous or co-operative meaning making?
    e. What assumptions are my/Roffey's take on facilitation based on?
    f. What other paradigms of facilitation are there?
2. The questions that arose from thinking about other third parties were:
    a. Is the purpose of a third party just to illicit in the moment responses from the learner that can be used to extrapolate to patterns which may emerge in the workplace?
    b. What are the pros and cons of using Actors as third parties? I.e. more realistic, but likely to be subject to social filters, skills of actor in giving feedback etc.
    c. Computer simulations: set number of pre-programmed responses, but no overt social filters of bias. Danger of in-experienced facilitators seeing horses as having a number of set responses and only looking for those they know about or are comfortable with.
    d. 2nd facilitator: dynamics of different perspectives?
3. The questions around the issue of a non-human (but sentient) third party were based around:
    a. Language: What is the role of the facilitator when it comes to helping learners interpret vs making sense of their experience?
    b. If clean language/observation is technique used, how clean does 'clean' need to be? Possibly linking back to intuition and awareness of own biases and filters?
    c. If this work leads to largely felt experiences that are not easily translated into a verbal language, what is the role of the facilitator in being sensitive to energetic cues or other ways of knowing?
    d. Or helping the learner become more sensitive to energetic cues or other ways of knowing?
    e. How important is comfort with that species? From a learner safety/comfort perspective?
    f. What are the downsides? Resisting the temptation to 'teach' horsemanship? Vs the expectation of a learner that there will be an element of 'how to' from the facilitator?

A refined list

At this stage the questions for me are, when facilitating leadership development for corporate clients:

- How are you (do you need to be) different as a facilitator when you are working with a horse?
- What do you need to be in tune with, within yourself, the horse and learner to do this work well?
- What do I mean by doing this work well? What assumptions underlie that standpoint?
- What assumptions do we as facilitators make about good facilitation? And do they stack up when you are working with a horse?"
- What is the role of language and other ways of making sense in experiential learning?

# APPENDIX B: RESEARCH INVITATION

Dear

My name is Sue Binks and I am an occupational psychologist with 18 years' experience of facilitating leadership development in the public, private and not for profit sectors. I am a senior consultant with Roffey Park Management Institute. I have been interested in and practicing Equine Assisted Leadership (EAL) development for 6 years. For my professional doctorate, I am looking at what we know about good practice in the facilitation of experiential leadership development and how this relates to the practice of EAL facilitation. My aim is first to understand how EAL facilitation is practiced at the moment. From this point I can start to understand what similarities and differences there might be between how traditional experiential leadership development and how EAL needs to be facilitated. From this I hope to bring greater clarity about what can be learnt from established practice and what is new, different or needs to be created for working with horses and leaders in a corporate context.

I've been given your name because you have a track record of working with corporate clients on leadership development with horses. It can be relatively easy to sell EAL once on the novelty alone, but to have a track record of repeat business means that you have credibility with these clients in this context. I'd really appreciate getting a better understanding of how you think about your practice as a facilitator and to digger deeper into that by videoing you working and talking this through with you and a participant.

What this would mean in practice is I would like to do a face to face or telephone interview to talk briefly about your background and any training you've had that relates to EAL facilitation. The main focus of the interview would be to get a better understanding about what underpins your practice, how you think about what you do when working with leaders and horses. I'd like to follow this up by videoing you working with a client (I have an unobtrusive Go pro type camera). This video would be used to prompt a more in depth interview about what was driving your practice in the moment. I would also like to use the same video to follow up with the participant/client to get a better understanding of how they experienced your facilitation.

As a fellow EAL practitioner and professional facilitator I would be happy to share my research findings with you and give any feedback you felt was required. I would also appreciate being able to bring together a group of likeminded practitioners together to jointly make sense of these findings. This would be a second stage of the research process, but more importantly and opportunity to create the impetus for a wider conversation about how EAL is practiced and how the growth and development of all practitioners could be supported.

My contact details are:

Sue.binks@roffeypark.com

07801616127

# APPENDIX C: PROMPT QUESTIONS FOR 1ST INTERVIEW

## Before

- How did you get into facilitating EAL?
- What does a 'typical' session look like if there is such a thing?
- What do you see as the purpose of your role as facilitator?
- What frameworks or models underpins your practice?

## During

***Participants***

- How do you support individuals and groups to make sense of their experience?

- How do you hold a 'safe enough' space open long enough for new learning or insight to be incorporated by the learners?

- How do you think about connecting learning to application in a leadership context?

***You***

- How do you become aware of your interpretations and intuitions?

- What are you paying attention to and why?

- What personal resilience strategies do you have for when working intensely?

# APPENDIX D: RESEARCH CONSENT FORMS

## Research consent form- Participant

Purpose:

I am conducting research into the practice of facilitating equine assisted learning for my professional doctorate. This is in order to get a better understanding of how the facilitator needs to be when working with horses to get the best outcomes for participants. As a facilitator, you have agreed to be part of my research and have agreed to be interviewed and videoed conducting a session of Equine Assisted Leadership Development. This video will be used as an aid to recall during a follow up interview. The videos will be kept as part of the doctoral research, but no other use, commercial or otherwise, will be made of them. No names of any participants or their organisations will be included in any subsequent analysis or write up. Anonymity and confidentiality will be assured at all times and you and your participants have the right to withdraw this consent at any time.

If at any time you want to contact me about this research, my contact details are:

sue.binks@roffeypark.com

07801 616127

I am happy for my session to be included in this research with the understand that video recording is part of this. I understand that I have the right to withdraw this consent at any time

Yes

No

Signature: _____ Date: _____

## Research consent form- Client

Purpose:

I am conducting research into the practice of facilitating equine assisted learning for my professional doctorate. This is in order to get a better understanding of how the facilitator needs to be when working with horses to get the best outcomes for participants. Your facilitator has agreed to be part of my research and has agreed to be videoed. This will involve playing back the video as an aid to recall during interview. The videos will be kept as part of the doctoral research, but no other use, commercial or otherwise, will be made of them. No names of any participants or their organisations will be included in any subsequent analysis or write up. Anonymity and confidentiality will be assured at all times and you have the right to withdraw this consent at any time.

If at any time you want to contact me about this research, my contact details are:

sue.binks@roffeypark.com

07801 616127

I am happy for my session to be included in this research with the understand that video recording is part of this. I understand that I have the right to withdraw this consent at any time

Yes

No

I may wish to follow up the session with a short conversation to get your feedback on the facilitation of the session. If you are happy to do this, please provide contact details below

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

# APPENDIX E: SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTS AND ANALYSIS

Participant 3 first interview

| Transcript | 1st level description | Questions and Notes | 1st level sense making/interpretation | Initial themes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sue: how did you get into equine assisted leadership development? | | | | |
| P: that's quite a long story! So I, it all started actually when my mum was diagnosed with terminal cancer and my horse Winston, Winnie for short, 6-year-old gelding, he reacted really extremely, to my of course extreme emotional state. My previous two horses had been schoolmistress type and looked after me and had got me through divorce and other difficult times, and I lost both of those through different medical conditions. I got Winston, I'd had him about 4 months, when mum was diagnosed with cancer and as we went through that year and I got more and more distressed essentially his behaviour got more extreme towards me. He did not want anything to do with me, he certainly did not want me on his back, he would rear, bite me kick me, push me over, just terrifying. I did not really know that much about horses at the time I'd got my first horse at 29/30 she was brilliant, second horse, brilliant horse. | Noticed a connection between her extreme emotional state and her horse's extreme behaviour | | Growing awareness of the connection between own emotional state and the sensitivity of the horse responding to that state | **Background/turning point**<br>Difficult personal issues<br>Connected own emotional state with horse's reactions |
| I really did not much he was completely terrifying; I was completely terrified of him. In my | | | | |

heart though I knew it was about me, as he wasn't like that with anybody else. Although I did not know anything, did not even know that natural horsemanship at that stage, what I did know is that he was reacting to me and nobody else. I was also, fortuitously in my first year of body psychotherapy training. So amongst all this and my mum dying, and his behaviour deteriorating around me I was doing all this training about the mind body connection, how emotions live in the body.

I was also in therapy myself, ostensibly as part of the training, I also badly needed it anyway not just because of mum but I'd just come out of a horrible divorce. So, I was on this track of discovery around the whole mind body thing. So when mum died about a year later, I'd just been coping with Winnie, I wasn't riding him any more I was just barely looking after him, I tried to keep out of his way as much as possible! Once mum had passed away and I started to get my life back on track, I started doing, on myself, the anxiety management, that I would eventually do with my client's. Obviously I did not have any clients, by that time I was in my second year of psychotherapy training. So I started practicing all this stuff myself, breath control, relaxation, when my body was changing, noticing the tension and breathing it out, more kind of meditation and

Knowing in my heart

Noticed that he wasn't like that with anybody else

Began training in body psychotherapy

Awareness of 'heart' -self-awareness?

Linked to Heron's forms of knowing? Imaginal and experiential? The somatic knowing?

Learning some theoretical basis for her observations?

Different forms of knowing-

'knowing in my heart'

Different forms of knowing- emotions and how they live in the body

Self-discovery and personal therapy

**Theory of learning**

Different forms of knowing

**Background**

Body psychotherapy training

Personal understanding of

stuff. So, bit by bit, so what I noticed was that if I was letting my emotions flow i.e. crying he was fine, but when I was trying to be brave and hold stuff in that he wasn't fine.

So that was one thing, the other thing was being present in my body. So when I was able to be present in my body he was able to tolerate me more, but when my emotions drove me out of my body, into anxiety basically into my head which was full of anxiety, he wasn't fine. I just started playing with this, in my own way, I hadn't had any training at that point, I was learning to read his body language, read his behaviour, when was he fine and when wasn't he fine. Bit by bit, eventually got my relationship with him back on track so that I could be calm around him, eventually I could get on him again, but that took quite a long time, just started with could we be in the same space together. So it was quite a process. I went from that, I started hacking him out, most of what I was doing body scanning; breath and muscle relaxation, constantly body scan, body scan, where's the emotion? where I am a feeling it in my body? let it go. where's the fear? Because I was still quite frightened of riding, quite frightened of him, he's quite a full on, emotional horse. I was still quite frightened of him really, I worked a lot when I was around him, let it

Being on a track of discovery around mind body connection supported by personal therapy.

Using breath and other practices to manage emotional states E.G anxiety. Noticing that when she let the emotions flow then the horse's reactions was to different to when she did not.

When present in body the horse could tolerate

Letting emotions flow as different to being present in the body?

Physical practices able to change experience of emotion and impact on horse

Mind-body connection- reading the horse's body language to gauge his emotional state and connecting it to own emotional state and presence

how emotions live in the body

**Mind-body connection**

Physical practices - impact on horse and human

Reading horse body language to give feedback on own state

go, let it go, be present, be present in the moment, let go, own my emotions.

her but when not present i.e. when anxious and in her head, he wasn't fine.

Learning to read the horse body language

Use of physical practices to find and let go of emotion.

Emotions able to drive out of connection with the body? What does being present in the body mean for her?

Importance of breath and connecting subtle signals from muscle tension connecting physical sensations in the body to emotions

Owning emotions, same as accepting them? Letting go of? Tension, emotions? Simple awareness?

Power of finding the sensations of emotions in the body; owning, accepting and letting go of emotions with physical practices

Physical practices – find, own and let go of emotions

So, that was all going very well, but there was still a bit of piece missing with him, which was the leadership. We still had disagreements, and there was still a massive knowledge gap, and by that point I'd rejected most of the traditional riding, teaching because everyone I'd consulted had told me to have him put down, he was so dangerous. (wow, OK!) Or smack him, or use spurs, put a martingale on him, whatever. I'd rejected all that and I was just finding my own way through, and then I discovered Parelli. And I started learning that, which was much more about technique, but it was also teaching me about horse behaviour and how to read horses and that kind of thing. I started running workshops for nervous riders, because I got myself on this point of being terrified to actually riding again. It was mainly just relaxation exercises. I'd gone self-employed by that point, and I needed to make some money! As you do! (laughing) So I ran 2 or 3 workshops in the area and when people were doing their sharing piece about when they'd lost their confidence or become frightened, it was always, always coincided with some life event; bereavement,

Leadership as missing piece

Rejection of traditional riding approaches which use force or restraint

Using Parelli techniques But, also, to increase understanding of horse behaviour.

Leadership as part of horse human relationship.

to give direction? To communicate?

Rejection of traditional dominance based approaches to working with horses

Finding her own way to be with the horse before discovering natural horsemanship methods

Practical awareness of how to read horse behaviours

Taking deliberate actions to influence through the body.

**Background**

Awareness not enough, needed to be able to give horse leadership too

**Turning point –** rejection of traditional, dominance based horsemanship methods

New knowledge - how to read horse behaviour

Not alone - traumatic events

divorce, illness, some kind of trauma, car accident. I was kind of 'How interesting'. So I'd logged that as how interesting and then when Mum's estate came through, and I was still a bit of a mess really, those last few years had not been kind, I went off to Colorado. I love this natural horsemanship; I'm going to get away for a couple of months. I signed up for a 6 week programme, they don't do it anymore, off to the Parelli ranch in Colorado. I was away 2 months altogether. I had the most remarkable, personal development journey, therapy, whatever, such a phenomenally transformative time as well as learning about horses and horsemanship. I was just reading the feedback this horse I leased was giving me, he was just amazing. I discovered about myself things that in 6 years of psychotherapy and therapy myself I hadn't even touched the surface frankly. I did all the lessons obviously but I journaled, I sat with him, but it was really sitting with him out in the meadow and journaling and reflecting, and I just had an amazing 6 weeks. And there was this point, a couple of weeks before the end. I was thinking about, god going back to my old life, doing leadership development courses and freelance work and all the rest of it and I just thought why wouldn't it work for other people? Why wouldn't it? Why would I not do this? Why should not I just give it a go? There was also something about just really, really wanting to share the gift and wisdom that horses can give us.

logged that others had lost their confidence or frightened with horses after some significant life-events

Allowing self to become immersed in the Parelli training and spending time with a horse with

Not alone- others experienced traumatic, blocked emotions as causing difficulty with horses

Horses as teachers: - by simply paying attention to what they communicate and connecting that with physical and emotional states, transformative

impacting other riders' relationships with their horses

Transformative personal development with a horse

It became not just a business opportunity, I became, why can't the whole world benefit from horses? I'm lucky enough to have a horse, I only had one at the time, I'm lucky enough to be here in Colorado, I have the money and the opportunity, but why should not anybody benefit, not just horse owners, and why wouldn't it work?

When I got back I wrote two articles, I'll send you them, the most interesting is the first one. I was just like, completely excited about this idea. So I wrote an article and it was published in a therapy journal. I just wrote about my experience not in a lot of detail about my personal process and the parallel's I drawn between the developmental time with the horse and the body psychotherapy and the bio dynamic approach to massage and psychotherapy. So that point it was just a figment of my imagination. So I just put it out there and said, do you know what I'm going to do this. Is that the sort of information your looking for?

The feedback from the horse enabled a phenomenally transformational shift in self-awareness. Reflective time and journaling with the horse present,

Reflecting on going back to an old life and (rhetorical) questions about why not? Whether others could benefit in the same way she had.

feeling lucky to have had that experience.

the knowledge of how to read horse body language better? precipitated a transformational experience.

with the ability to pay attention to the subtle horse cues?

A life that perhaps did not feel like it fitted anymore?

insights can be generated

Old career no longer fit – stepping into a different awareness

A whole new set of exciting possibilities opening. Excited by possibility of a

**Turning point**

Not wanting to return to old life

Wanting to share a powerful gift

**Personal congruence**: can't go back when know how powerful this method can be.

(see notes on interview process)

More than just a business opportunity

wanting to share the benefit, the gift of transformation through horses with others.

A sense of excitement and commitment?

Determination, pursuing a personal purpose not just a business opportunity?

different way of developing people

Excited about the possibilities of this work

Parallels between horse work and body psychotherapy

Sue: Yes, absolutely! So you said you'd done your psychotherapy training what's your background before that, HR and L&D  is not it?

**Background**

P: I started in graduate recruitment, went into training and then into management training, then OD, that sort of route. And I was at Nokia, I did about 6 years in general management of engineering and customer services division. So it was very corporate.

Range of corporate supporting roles i.e. HR/L&D as well as management experience

Depth of experience of traditional leadership development and OD

Experienced developer

Sue: You, said that you'd not had any training at that point. So was that in Equine assisted leadership development stuff or was that just Parelli?

**Background**

P: Oh, that was just Parelli. There was no reference to equine assisted learning. The only thing was that really encouraged me, I was thinking, could this possibly work? was that, I did not know it existed, I did not know Linda Kohanov existed and I did not know any of it existed, it was still just an idea. I was just struck by all the parallels with the all the embodiment. It was all about horses helping us to be in our bodies and to help us through what was stopping us from being in our bodies. A slightly different entry point into equine assisted learning I suppose. I met a guy, somebody else who was on the course, there as

'Just an idea' excited by possibilities- an idea arrived at independently of other practitioners in the field.

Sense of breaking new ground, and seeing connections

Parallels with embodied psychotherapy

Embodiment, horses helping us be in our bodies

Being present to the sensations in our bodies?

Mind-body connection- horses helping us be in/get back to our bodies

Horses helping people to be more present in their bodies

about 60 of us studying at the ranch. And we were just chatting over lunch about what you do and he said I'm an equine assisted therapist. Oh really! That exists does it?! Ching Ching! He put me in touch with EAGALA, I did their level 1 and 2 training, level 1 that autumn and went to one of their conferences. I did not like what I saw, to be honest, I think we've had this conversation before! (yes, trying to do experiential learning with 40 people!) and trying to maintain emotional safety and confidentiality.

So I wasn't impressed, and I met called Harriet Worthington. We got on really well and she had already done a few events with her horses. Had she done a Linda Kohanov course? I think she might have. So the first year's work was with Harriet, we set up Equest together actually, it was a partnership. When I first started out, we were kind of feeling our way with how we worked with clients. But the relationship did not work out, so I kept the business as a limited company and she went off and did her own thing. It was really only at that point that I found my feet because I was doing how I wanted do it. And I was doing it with this very embodied approach, I was also, by that point working therapeutically. I've always had a mix, I'd say 85% is corporate, 15% is therapeutic. So I'd already been working with my horses and private clients therapeutically based on a very

Inadequacy of formal training at the time.

Confidentiality and emotional safety not present during EAL training available at the time.

lots of different people putting out approaches Linda Kohanov, EAGALA etc., but did not gel with her way of wanting to do this work.

Finding her own way – as formal training deeply unsatisfactory

**Self-discovery:**

finding her own way, an embodied approach

formal training in EAL inadequate

embodied approach, but it was only really once I'd separated from Harriet that I could really drive that through the leadership, team and OD work.

Feeling her way when first starting

Inadequacy of existing training approaches e.g. EAGALA

Finding her own way to work and holding true to the embodied approach

Started working therapeutically but shifted the balance to more leadership work about a year into practicing

Embodied approach central method

Sue: So, if there is such a thing as a typical session, whether its leadership, team, or I'd be intrigued to know more about how this stuff works at the OD

**Theory of learning?**

perspective. So if there is such a thing as a typical session what's it look like?

P: Typically, let me draw this. What I've discovered, it was initially accidental, one day I sat down and realised that it was the same things that were present in the mix, the really transformational stuff. There's meant to be 6, so we start off with people doing something that helps people be calm, help them to arrive (so grounding, settling?) yes, normally what I do, this is the same individual, group or team who have come for leadership training, we observe horses. We go outside, hopefully it is not raining, but even if it is we still do it. The task brief is observing horse behaviour, so we turn some horses loose in the arena and its observe them interacting in silence, just notice what you notice. And then we'll talk about what you notice. That's kind of about it, obviously there is an element of they do learn about horse behaviour, they learn about how horse move each other about, they learn what ears mean, what flicking tails mean. They learn about keeping themselves safe and everything. But actually it is really a mindfulness exercise (by stealth!) yes, by stealth! (laughing) By day 2 of a programme it is not by stealth anymore. I will say, now we are going outside and

Noticing the same things are present in the mix when transformation happens

Helping people to be calm, to arrive.

Use of observation of horses for both calming and helping people arrive.

Understand various aspects of horse behaviour which helps to keep them safe.

Elements that need to come together for transformational learning?

Simple task structure/ instructions

Finding her own way – reflecting on what was present for transformation

Deepening levels of: noticing, connecting, embodied presence

Simple structure to create space for noticing

Tuning into communication from

6 things present in learning when it is transformational

Firstly client's need help to be calm, settle and arrive, be mindfully present

**Theory of facilitation**

Simple instructions – notice what you notice

Double duty – mindfulness and learning about keeping safe around horses through observing

Varying style of exercise – tone,

I will probably do some sort of standing mediation, depending on the needs of the group, the tone, and how deep they want to go, but it is mindfulness. But it is about really helping them just be calm, the environment is really important that's why I don't do arenas, it has to be outside somewhere beautiful.

The next tranche is about presence, so that's, whatever the activity is the next level of helping whoever it is to drop down, it will help them be present or notice what is getting in the way of them being present. So in the context of the horses that tends to be about meeting the horses.

So if they aren't present and they aren't calm, the horses won't go anywhere near them as you know (yep). The meeting of the horses session, that's what that's about. Again it is a very loose brief, but it is literally just about meeting the horses, what feedback is the horse giving you what happens to you when the horse wanders over (or Does not) is it frustration that comes up, anxiety, rejection. So we then kind of work with that. Then the next piece, I forgot what I call this box, I think it is then about focus. So that's about energy really, dialing up dialing down, can they get a tangible sense of their energy and what messages

Mindfulness, standing meditation, helping participants to be calm

After calming and arriving, activities shift to help person to drop down and notice

Bringing people in to the present moment.

Importance of physical environment.

'Drop down'- through layers of awareness?

When meeting the horse what is the horse communicating?

horses by sight and felt sense

Calm awareness of the felt as central- a stilling of the mind to allow awareness to surface

Environment as important to physical state

Deepening awareness of presence or blockers to presence

Being present enables the possibility of emotions being information

depth, needs of clients

Exercise designed to create space for awareness

**Theory of learning**

Part of arriving is presence

'drop down' deepen awareness of presence

**Theory of facilitation**

Loose brief of task

are they getting from the horses about their energy. So in terms of what that looks like in the field it might be moving horses, leading horses, it might be a variety of basic tasks depending on whether it is an individual or a group, whether we've got 1 day, 2 days, 3 days or a week. So, we then move around to something more about purpose. Once people are calm, they know about being present, they've learnt something about their energy, its then exploration of what's their purpose. Where do they feel it? Can they bring it into their body, in an embodied way, with the right kind of energy, to motivate themselves, or others or the horses, or to overcome obstacles or whatever it is? I suppose this is where it starts getting interesting. Depending on the individual or the team, obviously the purpose shapes up differently for everybody, but also what they need to embody the purpose in an appropriate sort of way. For some people it might be about, really connecting with their purpose, or not having one, or it might be not being brave enough to own it.

Actually, no, I've missed one out, I've got to shove everything round one, I've missed courage. Working with fear is really, really important, and that's quite early on. That is so important. How do they know when they are afraid, what it feels like in the body, can they let it go at a physical level? Forget talking about it or arguing with it or

Loose brief of meeting a horse as way of getting feedback on presence and what emotions come up.

Understanding how to dial up or dial down energy as the next area that is explored with messages from the horse about their energy

Purpose as the 4th area to explore. Can the person feel their purpose, bring it into

What is happening for the person?

Then 'working with' whatever comes up. Just becoming aware of feelings? Processing them in some way?

Again, simple tasks/ structure but those depend on factors such as group size, length of programme

Horse as catalyst for processing emotions physically

From awareness to control or change- being able to manipulate energy

Asking again to notice what happens, what emotions arise from horse's response to them.

'working with' what comes out of that noticing

**Theory of learning**

2nd piece- focused energy

Awareness moves to choice

**Theory of facilitation**

Task depends on group size and

rationalizing why they should or should not have the fear. Can they work with it on a physical level at an embodied level and let it out of their muscles, breath it out? And being around the horses I find, absolutely crystalizes what people are afraid of. At one level it might be about being hurt by the horse and it is very likely that stuff will come up about attachment issues, about looking silly in front of their friends or colleagues, about losing control, about being rejected, about the horse not liking them, about what would happen if they were assertive, what would happen if they succeed, if they failed. So in very real terms, the anxiety comes out.

So, we work with that and then start looking at focus and energy and then we bring that into embodied purpose. So that's about having a purpose and being able to muster and direct the energy. And for some people it is about having more energy, for some it is about having less energy, more clarity, more flexibility it can be anything really. Then there is something about relating to others. So that's once people have really come around the wheel and they are much more grounded in themselves what they are about and what might be getting in the way then I explore around relational stuff, whatever the context is.

their body? Does it have the right kind of energy to motivate?

Working with whether the purpose is clear, owned, absent etc.

Fear and courage as really important

Working with fear on a physical level and

Is this about managing state? Physically understanding fear and how to let it go?

Awareness of inner world of purpose and energy to move

working with the emergent now- physically and emotionally

mind- body awareness, releasing and focusing energy so that purpose can

length of programme

**Theory of learning**

3rd– courage and fear- working with emotions on a physical level

Don't talk about or rationalize emotions, let them go physically

**Role of Horse**

Catalyst for exploring fear and other emotions

**Theory of facilitation**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| And then the final one is about sustainability, which can mean a number of things. For individuals that can be managing energy and building resilience. For a team it might be kind of more about team dynamics and looking after each other, what creates the stress in the team, the stress patterns, what are the… (the conflict points?) yes, etc. In this overlap between presence and fear there's something about emotions as information. | whether they can let it out.<br><br>Horses as a catalyst for understanding fear. working with those fears and anxieties | Emotions as energy and releasing the potential from blocked emotions? | be embodied, manifested.<br><br>A key component is the understanding of fear and its variants and how to work with it effectively in the moment | 'working with' Exploring anxiety based emotions which are brought up or crystalized by being with the horse<br><br>**Theory of learning**<br><br>4th – embodying purpose with appropriate energy |
| So that's where I'll do the body scanning and working with what comes up, what people notice when they do the body scan and turn that emotion into information rather than driving behaviour, separating the emotion from reaction. So that's an embodied way doing it rather than a cognitive one. So in terms of the facilitation process, if I only have people for a day, the chances are we won't cover all that. Three days, yes, if it is less than that they'll definitely do this and this (pointing to presence and courage) and then I'll dip into the other bits depending on the needs of the group and the objectives of the intervention. | mustering energy and focus, directing energy towards a purpose. | Again, the phrase 'working with' what does this mean for her? Simple awareness? Processing - emotionally? Physically? | Giving an experience of energy as something that can be consciously used- 'muster and direct' | Energy as something that can be consciously directed<br><br>5th area- relating to others<br><br>6th – sustainability individually or collectively |

6th area to focus on is relating to others.

Final area to focus on is sustainability. From personal resilience to team dynamics

emotions as information.

body scanning: Practical tool to create awareness of emotion as information and

Exploring what? Challenges, awareness of other as well as self? Etc.

Level of sophistication required to notice and use emotions as information

Practical, physical approaches to making more conscious choices on how to react.

Core of the transformational elements as presence and working with fear/courage. To be present and aware, to understand the fear based emotions that may drive unconscious reactions, both are crucial.

Being present to own mind-body

**Theory of facilitation**

**Role of facilitator**

Help clients to be present and aware then work physically with emotions as information

**Theory of learning**

Emotions can drive behaviour or be seen as information

Refine ability to use emotions as

separate emotion from reaction

There are core elements which include presence and courage, with other elements used depending on purpose of the intervention.

connection first, then others second

Physically creating awareness of emotions as information and generating the capacity for choice

Time influences depth and breadth of what can be explored

Contract and needs of the group

information through physical practices

**Theory of facilitation**

Focus of the workshop depends on purpose and time.

Sue: Ok, that makes sense. So that's a lovely way of thinking about the design of a programme, I suppose I'm also thinking about when you are facilitating this, whether it is 1day, 2day, what are you paying attention to and why?

**Theory of facilitation**

P: So I'm paying attention to the horses, so when we go out and do this horse observation, and the

group is standing around the fence observing the herd, there maybe 3 or 4 horses together. I'm reading the herd behaviour to give me information about the client group (right getting a preview? Laughing) yes, (laughing!). When I'm in a session with an individual, to be honest even if I have a group come, 60% of the work is 1:1 3 people will watch and 1 person will be active with the horse for example. it is a combination of observing the horse and observing client, the things I'm looking for, oh and the third leg of the stool if you like, is my own personal tracking, my own body scanning, so my radar is on 3 ways.

So with the horse I'm noticing changes in their level of relaxation or tension, changes in their level of interest and engagement (wry smile!) (right, laughing!), changes in their breathing which I suppose would go with relaxation; changes in the pattern of their behaviour; have they been standing still and suddenly walk away? Have they been avoiding the client and suddenly walk up to them? Even details like how fast are the chewing? Even if they have been eating how fast or slow. Ears, where are they going? Are they paying attention to the client or are they invisible?

3-way radar, the horse or horses in a herd, the client who is interacting with the horse and aware of own personal tracking, scanning self for physical information

Specific focus on elements of horse behaviour including relaxation or tension indicated by breathing, movement or stillness or a change thereof.

and the group observing?

Whole field awareness with horse as primary source

Whole body attending to

Physical, observed and felt data privileged

A picture builds from what the horses do or don't do

Patterns emerge from micro observation of the horse

Attention – 3 way

Radar- horses, client, self

Attention- micro body language of the horse, patterns, energy, interest etc

Attention- client body language, what is said or not said

So I have my radar on the horse, I have my radar on the client. I'm looking for, at their body, what's happening in their body at their energy. Is there energy? Where is it? Is there tension? Where is it? What's the pattern of behaviour if there is one, what they say, if they say anything? If the walk in and say, 'I hope he likes me'. (So you are clocking all that information, and the projections?) Yes, or they'll suddenly say 'so what do they eat in the winter?' (so straight into their head?) well yes, straight into their head, but I'd also see that as an avoidance question. That would be for all sorts of reason, but its avoidant, even though they may not be aware of it, I'm still clocking all that.

Also, looking at the client's body for cues of tensions, energy etc.

Aware of what is said, and what that *may* mean. Avoidance tactics etc.

Tuning into the energy field of the client. Of what is said and not said

So I'm tracking, scanning my own body. Do I suddenly get a headache, or do I suddenly feel I can't feel my legs, do I suddenly start feeling my tummy is a bit tight? I trust that my body will resonate with what's happening between the client and the horse. My body will probably resonate with the client's. So if I get a headache, they've probably got a headache. If I suddenly lose my legs and I can't feel my feet on the ground, the client has probably lost their ground.

It does seem to me that the horses, I don't know whether it is the size gut and intestine or the size of their heart, the size of their internal organs, or the way that they communicate with each other, but when I'm working with the horses it is almost

like they are an amplifier of the client's energetic resonance.

So I pick up much more data in body is what I'm saying about clients if I've got a horse there than I would in a meeting room on my own. So I'm tracking those 3 things and I will be storing information until the point I think I can make sense of something. Or if there is a sudden change or the client feels really, really stuck, and they have to be really stuck before I will step in, then I will make an intervention.

And that initially that is something normally very light that, 'what's happening right now' or 'I notice the horse walk away' and see what happens. Or 'I'm curious about what happened in that corner when you approached the horse?' Say the horse has come up to them, or gone to sleep or trotted off, or the horse has breathed out deeply. So the horse's response to the client is generally what guides me as to when I should make an intervention. And it will always be that kind of very, very open, non-judgmental, just 'I wonder what's happening?'. (So just allowing a space to open for someone to explore or not as the case may be?) Yes, yes, and then I just work

Tracking own body, notice suddenly if there is a different physical sensation

Trusting that her body will resonate with what's happening between client and horse

Horses as amplifiers of energy.

More information available with a horse than without.

The amount of self-awareness to do this and to separate out own biases, issues, projections etc is substantial.

Heart Math? Which way round does it work? The

Own body resonating with client's as data. High degree of self-awareness and reflecting in the moment.

Attention – self trusting body will resonate with client

Whole field awareness

**Role of horse**

Amplify client's energetic resonance

More information available with horse present

**Theory of facilitation**

Heightened self awareness

with what happens which could be a whole host of things (end of part 1).

Tracking and storing information, without intervening until a sense begins to be made.

Interventions, when first made are 'light'; a simple observation or inquiry. Generally guided by what the horse has done.

horse reacts to client's energy and the client responding to the horse's energy.

'working with what happens' what does this mean for her?

Being guided by what emerges. Gestalt,

Sensing energy amplified by the presence of the horse

Gathering data until a sense can be made

Open, gentle inquiry prompted by the behaviour of the horse, both the what and the when.

Ability to notice and hold information

Sense making for self without judging

Being guided by what the horse has done

Interventions – when a sense has been made of the data

Intervention – open inquiry

Intervention – observation or

foreground and background. Working in the emergent now

Holding a non-judgmental space

Working with what emerges

question about here and now experience

Non-judgmental

Holds a space

Work with what emerges from the interaction with the horse

Sue: You mentioned about the participant, the horse and yourself, do you pay attention to the whole group? Especially if it is a team?

P: so if it is a team, I would start off introducing people to the horses one at a time. So for that I'd normally break them down in to subsets of 4, so 1 facilitator per group, sometimes there is a horse specialist as well depending on the size of the group, and assuming that the facilitators I've got on board are skilled up with the horses as well. If there are 3 people observing from the fence line, and they are always outside the field to preserve

**Role of facilitator**

Hold a safe space – confidentiality

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| that boundary, I'm observing them, absolutely. So if I hear them giggling, or see them checking their phones, then when I go back to the fence, so we'll debrief a bit as we go, me and the person in the field. so that's always confidential, then we go back to the fence so I'll ask them what they'd like to share with the group. I might say at that point, 'oh at such and such a point, I noticed you giggling, can you share what was happening for you three?' So I try and stay absolutely non-judgmental, or I noticed you were checking your phones, share with us what was happening for you? I wonder how that might have been for your colleague. Or I might say how was that for you, John? (so understanding what was happening in that dynamic?) yes, and I say how familiar is that in what happens at work? So that's another question that goes in a lot, is this a familiar feeling, that happens in the field and at the fence, is this familiar? It normally is, but if they say it is not then we just move on to something else. Normally, they say things like, 'yes, no one pays attention in meetings' or 'whenever anyone makes a mistake everyone laughs at them' or those sorts of things. And some of the most powerful, powerful insights happen at fence, especially with teams. it is about how competitive they are, how supportive they are, how respectful they are, how trusting. I don't shirk from naming, and of course it all happens in the first hour. | 'Preserving the boundary' But also observing what happens with the group who are watching. 'debrief a bit as we go' focus on the individual having the experience<br><br>Then when come back to the group, giving an observation of their behaviour, trying to stay non-judgmental based on observation.<br><br>Asking about whether the experience is familiar at work, but moving on if it is not. | Confidentiality as a component of safety? What else for her?<br><br>Work based connection? Anchoring? Application? | Holding a safe, confidential space to explore with each person<br><br>Raise awareness with open, non-judgmental observations<br><br>Offering questions to connect with the familiar | Observer the observers<br><br>Work with what emerges as it emerges for each person<br><br>Offer observations to raise awareness in the here and now.<br><br>Familiarity - Connect here and now with work |

That's why I love working with horses, it takes people unexpectedly.

So I think pretty much, most of the time the most unhelpful behaviours manifest in the first hour and then you've got 2 days to work with it. Then say you've got a team of 8, once all 8 people have reached this point (courage) and they can be calm and present with the horses (then it is working with their fear?) then I, depending on how long we've got and what the themes seem to be for the group, we may need to dip into here or here, if we haven't got enough time. It just emerges for a team

Sue: So the first three are around calm, present and courage are the core, then depending on the group or the length of time or what has emerged then its relating to others or focus?

P: Or whatever seems to be the unhelpful patterns will be what we address. The kind of tasks that we do are the same, there is a limit to the number things that you can do with a horse! And it is not doing that makes the difference, it was happens in the process of the doing that matters. Once they've got to that point, then

Not shirking from naming uncomfortable things.

Things happen quickly when working with horses, taking participants unexpectedly.

When unhelpful behaviours surface early on it gives most of the programme to deal with those patterns.

There seems to be an order or priority? If they can be calm and present, then other things can be worked on like courage and fear.

Varied factors influence what can

Courage to name behaviours that might be patterns

Calm and present as a state before working deeper, on a more emotional level.

Naming patterns

**Theory of learning**

Calm and present as a state for deeper work

they'd go into pairs, then 4's and normally I don't take teams for any less than 2 days. By the end of the 2 days I'd expect them to being doing something as an 8 with a bigger herd, but not until they've got used to being around the horses in incremental stages.

Calm and present, then work with fear and courage

The tasks are similar irrespective of the issues. What emerges when the participant does the task is what is important.

be explored such as length of time with group, the group dynamics or what has emerged as an unhelpful pattern for that group.

Structuring is deliberately hierarchical and simple to create space for emotional processing, insights etc.

Length of time important when dealing with a team.

Complexity of team dynamics?

Noticing patterns and working with what emerges

Simplicity of task to allow space for depth

Task is irrelevant – it is a vehicle for learning to emerge

Sue: Earlier you mentioned saying 'is this a familiar feeling', and you said I'll hold stuff until I

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| can make sense of things. What is the process of sense making for you and the participants? | | | | **Theory of Facilitation** |
| P: it is all intuitive, Sorry! | | | | Intuitive, embodied awareness and sense making |
| Sue: No, No, in some ways that great! So how do you become aware of your intuitions then? | Intuitive sense making | | | |
| P: it is just body awareness. A lot of head work going on. So, urm, (pause) I'm trying think of an example from last week, it is slightly different because it was more of a therapeutic contract. Say if somebody, (pause) I'm trying to think of a real example that would be helpful. I'm going to make this up, because the ones from last week aren't helpful. OK I've got a real person in my head now, I see them being frustrated, they go out, they are very distracted, shuffling around a lot, hands in pockets, horse ignoring him. So I'm feeling a bit annoyed, I notice I'm starting to feel a bit annoyed, so I let that go. So eventually he turns around and says, this horse Does not like me he's too busy eating. And then it goes on and on. I'm then processing on one level my own irritation, this guy's really irritated me and I can't quite understand why. So I'm working on my own compassion and open heartedness and that kind | Becoming aware of intuitions through the body.<br><br>Observing and making inferences based on body language of participant and own felt responses; 'annoyed'. Letting go of annoyance and processing irritation, trying to | Imaginal and experiential knowing? A la Heron?<br><br>Very much in touch with and able to name own, subtle emotional states | Non-linguistic, intuitive awareness<br><br>Sensitive to own inferences and subtle emotional states, able to work on shifting those states whilst still observing and | Awareness- own inferences and emotional states<br><br>Self-management – processing own |

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| of thing. He's very dismissive, blames it on the horse and then makes light of it with his colleagues. But I haven't forgotten that actually when he went out there he was very distracted and highly anxious even though he said he wasn't, and that he said the horse did not like him, but he did not say that when he went back to the fence. He said this horse is greedy and wants to eat a lot, blah, blah. So I store all of that. | understand own emotion in relationship to participant as well as connecting with felt sense of open heartedness. | | trying to understand their source | state and cultivating compassion |
| We go again to meet the horse, and I do a bit of body scan, talk to the group about body scan. Ask what's happening in your body now? Initially he can't put his finger on anything, then 'I've got butterflies in my tummy'. Then, 'What's happening in your legs?' 'Nothing's happening in my legs'. And I'm think yes, I know and that's part of the problem! (laughing). So OK at that point a suggest mirroring the horse, see those horses over there, they are grazing, just go over there, do what they are doing, just go and hang out with that horse. Forget the exercise. Even imagine you are the size of horse, and you have 4 feet, you're as heavy as a horse and they are solid in the ground, and just track the horse, whatever he does with his front legs and you do what he does but stay at the edge of his personal space. So I'm working with his focus, with his legs, keeping ground and also just trying to get him to relax around the horse, but I haven't forgotten that he | Describing the pattern of blame and dismissing, what he does and Does not say when with colleagues and holding awareness of other aspects too, e.g. initial anxiety and distraction. All this is stored | Noticing patterns of behaviour, projections, avoidance etc. but storing rather than interpreting or reflecting back at the time | | **Others' awareness**- what is and is not said, what is in or out of awareness |
| | | | Storing data, but still just raising awareness, | **Role of Facilitator** |
| | Using a body scan for self and gives it as a tool for participants. Responds to his lack of awareness in body with an exercise to support developing that awareness through mirroring the horse. | Bringing awareness of body into the group's awareness | | Raise awareness of body |
| | | Helping to increase the | encouraging participants to have a felt experience | **Directive Structuring**: Suggest ways to experience something different physically |

said this horse Does not like me, but not owning it.

participants' physical awareness?

Getting people back in touch with their physical awareness, back to their body

Now that particular person, it took a whole day, he couldn't get a horse to touch him, at all. My heart was just breaking for him; he was trying just so hard. He came back on the second morning; he was quite down. I really failed and none of the horses liked me, but he's shared this we the group by this point.

Directive structuring

Compassion and understanding of emotions

And I'm really tired of trying. So profound. I'm exhausted, I tried so hard yesterday, he Does not actually verbalize, I try so hard to be liked. But that was it, that's his story and the anxiety was about not being liked, the anxiety he carried day in day out, the way he interacted with his team was all about being liked. His lack of assertiveness was all about not being liked. His inability, everything he set out, how can I delegate better and get my team to listen to what I want them to do. I've decided that I'm just going to sit in the field, because it is quite a nice day and I'm completely exhausted.

'my heart breaking for him'. By day 2 the participant able to share with the group what was sitting underneath, share his 'story'.

No need to intervene at all to illicit this disclosure?

Compassionate when anxiety finally surfaces and can be owned

So, we put a plastic jump block in the middle of the paddock and just sat down. The group just observed in respectful silence. After about 10 mins, a horse looked up and wandered over. And

he just put his nose on the guy's shoulder and blew down his ear, it was such a beautiful moment, just amazing. So moving, so moving and I just left him there, he had his 20mins in the field. I went to him to debrief out of earshot of the group and of course, he made all the links himself. I did not have to say anything, he realised that it was at the root of all his problems. 'I just work so hard to be liked' and he was a senior manager, with a big team of 40 people in a big household name client, the pressure on him was unbearable. The more senior he got the less able he felt to do the job and the more risked not being liked. Actually then everything changed. The rest of that day, it was only a 2 day programme. The most wonderful thing was that at the end of that day, that team split into 4's, they did a show at the end for the others with their little herd. His show, was literally walking around the arena with horse on a loose rope, stroking him. Standing up in front of the team, it is been great for me because I'm not afraid anymore. When I let go, when I stopped trying he came to me. I realised I don't have to try for you, or people to like me, I just have to be myself.

That's a very long answer to your question!

Sue: it does help. So often the experiences people have, are so difficult to put into words, it is more

Followed what the participant wanted to do after his disclosure.

Moved by the horse's response

Went to debrief in out of earshot. Made all the links himself

Autonomous structuring and meaning making

did not need to prompt? Or just held a safe space? Not seeing her role as important at this point

The courage to follow what the participant felt they needed and to hold the space whilst the horse and participant interact

Holding a compassionate and confidential space for disclosure and sense making

**Courage** to follow the client's intuition

**Holding a space :** confidential, safe, non-judgmental, for interaction with horse

Knowing self through interaction

of a felt sense. it is more about what is it you do to create the opportunities for sense to be made. And that gives a lovely answer about how that space is provided and held.

P: it is probably much more about holding; very clean, very open, no judgement or try not to attach judgement, not always easy. Just nudging people along with what's happening. I'm curious about, tell me more about, share with me something about, is this familiar? What about it is familiar? What kind of sadness? What kind of frustration? Share something more about that. I'm leading people to draw their own conclusions. I'm working really hard to make sense of what I see and feel in order to guide the session. But it is less about, I'm not thinking about any psychological models or anything like that. So with this guy, I've got all these clues, but what I really know is that he really needs to feel his feet on the ground. Or with someone else it may be that they need to feel more energy in their shoulders or they're locked up around the pelvis, or they're always off in their head, how do I get them back into their body.

Sue: So quite minute observation of the physical? You are seeing something?

the gestalt idea of there being no static self, just one constructed in the interaction or contact with another

P: yes, yes, so I might get them doing something to free up their body, so once the body frees up, then the energy frees and the insights come.

Holding a clean and open space without judgement, just nudging people along. With simple interventions, very simple, open inquiry question, clean language.

Leading people to draw their own conclusions, guiding the sessions

Using body intuitions to guide 'he really needs to feel his feet on the ground' etc. getting people back to their body.

Encouraging people to express their experience in the present moment, holding a non-judgmental space

Guiding, through own sense making, but also being guided by own physical intuitions, offering a physical way to create a different experience and noticing what comes up as a result

**Encouraging** – to express their truth, to make sense for themselves

**Guiding:** simple inquiry, clean language, trying something to create a different experience

**connecting** with their physical

when body frees up so does energy and insight.

Directing to create a different experience, free something up

Working somatically to access emotions and generate insights

experience and access emotions

**sense making:** connecting with what is familiar, make sense for themselves, but also through the body

**Guided:** by the horse and own physical sensations and intuitions

**Observing** the minutiae

**Theory of learning**

Insights will come when the energy is freed physically

Sue: In terms of that observation ‘so what’s happening for you right now?’ Where does the horse figure in all that?

P: I suppose the theoretical level; I’m working with the sympathetic, parasympathetic cycle. it is my belief that the horse, whether they are resonating, and that’s what I don’t know, is whether are resonating with the client’s sympathetic nervous system or whether it is their own because they have a job to do, I don’t know. But it appears to me to be the case, so when the horse is going up. This is at rest this something happens (drawing arrows). In body psychotherapy or biodynamic massage, this is what happens. So we are essentially working with this in the person. So we talk a lot about what happens to the person under stress or threat. We work with it, as an emotional process. So something builds, there’s a release or an insight, then the emotional body as well as the physical body goes into relaxation, integration and rest. So EG. This is all in my article, in a body psychotherapy session, we support the client, it might a conversation or it might a massage or energy work or movement, but we are supporting the client on the upswing. This is about experiencing the feeling, naming the emotion, or issue. There’s then a discharge, ‘I get it’ or the body says ‘I get it’ (emotional release?) or emotional release of some sort. This is where we

Sympathetic and parasympathetic cycle, of energy building and being released in the horse. Horse as resonating with client’s own system possibly?

Cycle of build, release or insight relaxation, integration and rest.

**Theory of facilitation**

Theoretical basis for following the cues of the horse

horse and human behaviour follow similar pattern of arousal, if horse resonating with client’s physical and emotional body, more obvious to see that in horse than human

might just do hands on work. They might lie down and I'll have my hands on their back or their feet, or they might just lie down in a little ball and have a snooze. That's the model, that's where I learned it.

What I think happens is the horse mirrors this. So they may be standing with a client and their jaw suddenly goes tight, that's the horse's, because I can see more on the horse than the client. So I might see the jaw go tight and they get those little wrinkles around their lip, or their breathing my get shorter, or muscle tension, more definition around the muscle. So that tells me the client is somewhere around here (on the upswing?). I know that a release and the down swing has started because the horse will start licking and chewing. Or depending on the horse, or they might just quiver around the mouth, they might not do a full lick and chew. So the horse is telling me, showing me whether the client's work is done or not. If the horse Has not shown some sign of release, the work's not done yet.

This happened last week, it is not the first time, it is the most recent example. One of the women I was working with, it was the most intense, amazing, incredible experience I've ever had. She

Supporting the client on the upswing i.e. experiencing an emotion then an 'I get it' or release of some sort

The horse mirrors this cycle and it is easier to see in a horse than a human.

Close observation of micro body language of the horse to give indications of what might be happening to the client. Knowing that

**Role of facilitator**

**Support:** when client is experiencing the emotional arousal and when it has been released

Supporting the client to get to release by helping them to experience in the here and now

**Observing:** where is the horse on the sympathetic/para cycle. **Minute detail** of horse body language

Able to navigate a session by where on the sympathetic/

had been in silent conversation with this horse for maybe 15mins with the group just observing in loving silence. The women had her back to me, but I could see the horse. The horse was absolutely still, very present, not asleep, but very relaxed, his bottom lip was very relaxed, ears were going like this and his eyes. She was facing him, we were all in the round pen and he was outside, she was on the gate of the round pen. She said, I think he's said what needs to be said. I don't agree, I think he's got more to say, look at him. The reason I said that was he was still clearly engaged with her, he hadn't licked and chewed. So she turned around again and stood a bit longer, and he was completely transfixed with her, in that same active state.

the relaxation has begun when the horse starts to display signs e.g. licking and chewing.

Being totally guided by the horse, if they haven't shown signs of release, the work's not done

Parasympathetic cycle the horse is

If the horse Has not released and relaxed, there is more work to be done.

**Theory of facilitation**

If horse Has not released physically the client is not done yet

**Role of facilitator**

She turned around again and said I think I'd like to go and stand with him. She went up to him, started stroking his nose, a tender moment. When I was scanning myself I noticed my arms were dead. I was also very emotional, but it was very emotional I felt something wasn't right, there wasn't enough energy in my hands. Stroke him with both hands because she'd been very gentle.

**Challenge:** if the horse Has not released and but the client thinks they're done, challenge them to stay with it.

She then said I'd like to see if I can lead him around the field. I was like why?! Obviously I did

Example of being guided by the physical response or lack of it in the horse

**Intuition:** being in touch with own

not say that! We were in the middle of this amazing interaction, so I thought how curious. The purpose of the task was supposed to be doing a constellation, we'd done a guided mediation and they were supposed to set up a part of the field as their dream and they were going to walk towards the dream with the horse and see what feedback the horse gave.

This particular client just kept on and on about how complicated her dream was that she couldn't. I ended up just starting her, use the time however you like, this is your time. The context is important. I just said very gently taking everything out of my voice, 'why would you like to do that, what's that about?' I just want to see if he will come with me to find my dream. I just said, he's come with you anyway, he's with you, what more is there? At that point he yawned and rolled his eyes and started licking and chewing. And of course she burst in to tears and just buried her face in his mane and that was it. What more do I want? When can I recognize good enough, recognize really amazing and can I allow myself to have it.

That wasn't a leadership client, but the approach is the same. The horse plays a major part, not just in their own right. In their own right they work with people, they work with humans, he was

Using own physical and emotional reactions to guide interventions with the horse, quite directive, 'stroke him with both hands'

Curiosity and self-regulation!

Directive structuring to create a different experience, intuition said it is not done yet/something wasn't right.

Using intuitions to give direction- getting the participant to have a different physical experience to see if that creates and emotional shift or release.

Noticing own reactions and regulating response in the moment to stay

physical sense of what is happening with client

**Directing:** creating a different physical experience to precipitate an emotional release or insight

Challenging: to help client gain insight

**Self-management:** noting internal response, staying curious

**Boundaries:** Time

giving her a hell of lot. There was unconscious, for her, there was a conversation going on, there was an exchange of energy and love and wisdom that I'm not party to. I believe in his own right he was doing that. And also he's giving me information. So by reading him, he was telling me that her work wasn't done. Equally, if he'd licked and yawned in the first 5 minutes and stretched and walked away I would have known to explore, what happened for you at that point when he walked away. So it works both ways, I might finish a session after 5 mins, because it is done. If it is a 30 min session and it happens after 5 mins then I'd do something, go and sit with horse and that's integration time. I don't look to do anymore because the work is already done. When the horse does that, it is like 'job done, I'm out of here, back to grazing'.

Time boundaries, clients have the time slot, they can use it as they want to. Even though very aware of own internal response to her wanting to walk with the horse, kept her voice gentle and asked an open question.

Made an observation, and another question.

curious, gentle and open

Holding boundaries firmly to create the safety within to be curious, open, gently questioning, offering simple observations

**Role of horse**

Observing their responses to guide the facilitator's choices

The horse exchanges energy, love and wisdom in their own right

The horses play a major part and work with clients in their own right… As well as giving the facilitator information.

Working with her energetically?

Respecting the horse and the way they can work with humans in their own right, over and above what we can get from simply observing their responses

If a horse releases quickly, explore what was happening at that moment. Still let each person have their slot, but if a shift has occurred, let the rest of the time be integration time.

**Theory of facilitation**

**Maintain time boundary, but shift the purpose** if horse indicates that something has shifted quickly, e.g. into integration

Trust that if the horse has released then the work is done

Sue: you mentioned about biodynamic and the parasympathetic system. What else under pins your work even if you don't refer to them or even think about them?

**Theory of facilitation**

Certain things like, trying to use really clean language, like being present, being grounded, finding compassion and love for whoever I'm working with. What else underpins it…I always put the horse first, so not exactly client centred! More horse centred, but if the horse is OK then the client is always OK. So, that might change the way I might changes things slightly.

Clean language as an underpinning. Own presence and grounded. compassion and love for client.

Horse put first

Disciplines of clean language and cultivating own presence, compassion. Consideration of the horse's need primary.

**Disciplines of**: clean language, maintaining own **presence**, being **compassionate** and **loving**

Putting the **horse first**

I suppose it would describe it as a person-centred approach as in I really believe the client has all the answers and we just help them discover it. I really believe that they have their own internal wisdom and worth and it is about helping them discover that. Other things that would be relevant, just trying to think of examples…some psychological types, but they are more like frames of reference, though most of those would probably be from my psychotherapy training rather than the OD arena. Though it is so difficult to tease apart as you just end up with the body of knowledge. Like MBTI, but then that's all based on Jung and then that fed into other stuff that's in my psychotherapy. it is hard to know what exactly do I use. But I suppose there were things like the group dynamic, but that's from what I've learned from facilitating groups, but I can't really remember where I learnt that. But it helps with managing a group (So that's from that experience of facilitating?) Yes, that's what I learnt about holding presence with a

Person centred in so far as holding a belief that clients have their own answers, and own internal wisdom; a facilitator's job is just to help them discover

Just having frames of reference…everything from psychological types to groups dynamics, facilitation, asking of questions, positioning things, holding presence with a group etc.

a body of knowledge from variety of experiences

A mindset of respect and belief in the inner wisdom present in participants, with a discovery frame

**Theory of learning**

Clients have their own answers and wisdom

**Theory of facilitation**

Experience of facilitation already well established

group, the way questions are asked, the positioning of things. That would all be from my OD experience

Helping clients **discover** their own wisdom and worth

Has frames of reference from **body of knowledge**

**Experience of facilitating groups –** positioning, holding a presence, how questions are asked

Sue: if you had to say from your leadership development days how is what you do now similar and different?

Solid background in many aspects of development before becoming an EAL facilitator

**Background**

What's similar about it is…that's such a hard question to answer! If I think about leadership work before I involved horses, I don't do any of that anymore! (laughing) because it Does not work! Apart from what I learnt about dealing with tricky situations, but that was experience rather than going on a course. (Sure). If I think back to how I used to work, I was always working to

Experience of dealing with tricky situations, just learnt on the job. Previous facilitation of leadership development would have been using other's theories or models

Experience of dealing with tricky facilitation situations, years of experience of working with a variety of

someone else's theory, even if I designed it myself. I'd be doing MBTI, team types, learning styles, Insights I'd be using models and case studies, competency based interviewing, 360, development centres, coaching based on a model.

approaches to leadership development

That was what I was doing. I don't do that anymore. it is, all felt, it is all that embodied influence, who you are, about spirit, energy, how you show up, what holds you back? where are your…. all the shades of emotionality? what are your fears? how can you be present in the world and be yourself? It may be called lots of things, but that's essentially what it is, that's what I want to do. And it might emerge differently depending on whether the programme is about influencing, leadership, team performance or client relationships. Whatever the framing is, that's what I want it to be for people. (So quite humanistic?) Yes, that's a very good way of describing it, and my psychotherapy training is very humanistic and holistic. My way in is through that holistic approach.

**Theory of learning**

Focus now more on how you 'show up' how you embody your influence, being present in the world and being yourself

deeper, existential questions about embodying leadership, showing up, as other approaches don't work

Self-as-instrument

Less about what you know and more about how you are being when you use that knowledge

As a facilitator, asking the powerful, existential questions of leaders and helping them to explore practically, in the present moment

humanistic and holistic

The programme may be different (influencing or leadership etc.) but it is all about embodied presence.

I suppose the things that would be the same are the things that I bring myself. So I my humor, my lightness, I like things to be quite playful, quite fun. I wouldn't say authenticity would be the

Container and context may be different, but it all comes back to the

same, as I don't think I had the courage to be really authentic. Now I do, I was still playing someone else's tune, because I don't think I had my own back then.

S: That personal journey, your own discover has really fed into how you facilitate the journey of others?

That's right, and the other thing is the experience, having worked with organizations, having experienced pain personally, that's worth a lot as a facilitator, that experience. Theoretically, I don't think there's a lot of it left.

S: and that all sounds like a lot of content, whereas what you are talking about how you help people learn for themselves.

Yes

Humanistic and holistic as a way in

Still bring own humour and personality, but now more authentic, not playing to someone else's tune anymore.

Personal journey has had impact on how work now. The experience of working in organizations as well as

role of embodying presence in those contexts

Underpinning philosophy of humanistic and holistic

Embodying her own authenticity, having experienced life's trauma's and made sense of them for herself

**theory of facilitation**

being authentic, light, playful

**experience of pain and personal learning** shapes practice as a facilitator

**experience** of working with organizations also shaped practiced

experiencing own pain has influenced practice as a facilitator

S: So, from my experience, the whole process is certainly quite intense for you as a facilitator. Short, Medium, long term, how do you keep yourself fit and well, your practice up to scratch? Maybe not quite right words, maybe more about how you self-renew?

**Self as instrument**

Yes, so I take the whole self-care thing seriously. So that's time with my own horses. So once I've done a programme, I just go and sit in the field with my horses if the weather's ok. If not, I find some other way to be with them and keep warm and dry! I don't normally ride; I just spend time with my little herd. That renews me massively. I like to walk, be out in nature. I like to do that on my own, I don't want to have people around me to do that, for a couple of days actually if it is been an intense programme. Eat well, sleep well, blah, blah. I have supervision, from a psychotherapy supervisor rather than a coaching or an equine supervisor because of the depth I'm working at. Even if the stuff is not named. Even if its not be emerged for the client, I'm still working at that depth.

**Self-care**: sit with horses, walk in nature, supervision, meditation and spiritual practices, reflective journaling

Self-care strategies in the short term, e.g. spending time with her herd, being outside and spending time on her own.

Back to self as instrument and maintaining efficacy on an energetic and emotional level

the investment of time and energy needed to maintain effectiveness is substantial.

**Professional :** CPD, networks and keeping up to date with developments in leadership

Importance of supervision for understanding the transference, projections and sense making needed

The depth of the work can't be underestimated

Developing horsemanship skills

Supervision from a psychotherapist because

What else do I do? You would call it mindfulness and meditation and spiritual practice, but I do that out there with my animals. I also write a lot, that's how I make sense of and get insights into my work. (so, like a reflective journal?) Yes, yeah.

I do CPD things, I'm a member of a networking group that meets once a month, that's mainly coaches. That's an interesting cross section of people, they take it in turns to run an evening. Or they get external people come in. I'm also a member down at Exeter for centre for leadership studies. That's hugely helpful, they run CPD days 4 times a year. They are quite alternative, people doing different things. A mixture of academics and practitioners. I don't do anything equine assisted as I haven't found anyone who works in the way that I like!

I advance my own horsemanship; I think that's important for the work. I'm doing classical dressage, mainly in hand. Really fine tuning in with my horse. Fine-tuning my general receptors whether it is with my horse or not. That's a bit tangential but I think that's quite important.

of the depth of the work she is processing

Mindfulness, spiritual practice, meditation reflective journaling etc. to get insights into the work

CPD from a coach network and Exeter centre for leadership studies

Working energetically and physically and being aware of impact the work has on the horses

Maintaining connection to other networks and practitioners in different fields as well as the constituent parts of presence and paying attention to horse behaviour are all part of maintaining efficacy

Sue: just thinking back to the overall question, is there anything that we haven't covered that you think is important?

Advancing own horsemanship to fine tune connection with her horses and horses in general

No, I don't think so. We've talked a lot about the energy of the group. So I'm looking for the general energy of the group, I'm always paying attention to the physical side of things. I'll always ask how were the horses at the end of day one, if I'm not working with my own horses. I want to know if one of the horses went back to their stable and lay down for 2 hours I'll know that something had gone on for whoever they've been working with!

Paying attention to energy and the physical aspects of humans and horses

Primacy of the physical and energetic

**Participant 3 Concepts and Themes**

- Background and turning point
- Theory of learning
- Theory of facilitation
- Role of Facilitator and horse
- Self as Instrument

**Background and turning point**

Difficult personal issues, **connected own emotional state with horse's reactions**. **Body psychotherapy training**, personal understanding of how emotions live in the body. **Mind-body connection -** Physical practices impact on horse and human. **Reading horse body language** to give feedback on own state. Learnt **physical practices** – find, own and let go of emotions. Taking deliberate actions to influence through the body. Awareness not enough, needed to be able to give horse **leadership too**. Turning point – **rejection of traditional**, dominance based horsemanship methods. New knowledge - **how to read horse behaviour**. **Not alone** - traumatic events impacting other riders' relationships with their horses. Her own **Transformative** personal development experience with a horse. **Turning point-**Not wanting to return to old life, Wanting to share a powerful gift. **Personal congruence**: can't go back when know how powerful this method can be. **Excited about the possibilities** of this work, **Parallels** between horse work and body psychotherapy.

**Experienced developer.** Experience of dealing with tricky facilitation situations, years of experience of working with a variety of approaches to leadership development**.** Parallels with embodied psychotherapy. Horses helping people to be more present in their bodies. **Self-discovery**: finding her own way, an embodied approach, Embodied approach central method. **Formal training in EAL inadequate at the time**

**Theory of learning**

6 things present in learning when it is transformational. Firstly client's need help to be calm, settle and arrive, be mindfully present. Part of arriving is presence, 'drop down' deepen awareness of presence. 2nd piece- focused energy, awareness moves to choice. 3rd– courage and fear- working with emotions on a physical level. Don't talk about or rationalize emotions, let them go physically. 4th – embodying purpose with appropriate energy. Energy as something that can be consciously directed. 5th area- relating to others. 6th – sustainability individually or collectively.

Emotions can drive behaviour or be seen as information. Refine ability to use emotions as information through physical practices. Calm and present as a state for deeper work. Task is irrelevant – it is a vehicle for learning to emerge. Insights will come when the energy is freed physically. Clients have their own answers and wisdom. deeper, existential questions about embodying leadership, showing up, as other approaches don't work. Humanistic and holistic

**Theory of facilitation**

**Simple instructions** – notice what you notice. **Double duty** – mindfulness and learning about keeping safe around horses through observing. **Varying style of exercise** – tone, depth, needs of clients. Exercise **designed to create space for awareness**. **Loose brief** of task. Asking again to **notice** what happens, **what emotions arise** from horse's response to them. **'working with'** what comes out of that noticing. 'working with' **Exploring anxiety based emotions** which are **brought up** or crystalized **by being with the horse**. Task depends on group size and length of programme, Focus of the workshop depends on purpose and time.

**Attention – 3 way radar**- horses, client, self. **Attention- micro body language** of the horse, patterns, energy, interest etc. **Attention- client body language**, what is said or not said. **Attention – self** trusting body will resonate with client. Whole field awareness. **Heightened self-awareness**. Ability to notice and hold information. **Sense making** for self **without judging**. Being **guided by** what the **horse** has done**. Interventions** – when a sense has been made of the data. Intervention – **open inquiry**. Intervention – **observation** or question about here and now experience. **Non-judgmental**. **Holds a space**. **Work with what emerges** from the interaction with the horse. **Maintain time boundary**, but **shift the purpose** if horse indicates that something has shifted quickly, e.g. into integration

**Intuitive**, **embodied awareness and sense making**. **Awareness-** own inferences and emotional states. **Self-management** – processing own state and cultivating compassion. **Others' awareness**- what is and is not said, what is in or out of awareness. horse and human behaviour follow similar pattern of arousal, if **horse resonating** with **client's physical and emotional body**, **more obvious** to see that **in horse** than human. **Disciplines of**: clean language, maintaining own **presence**, being **compassionate** and **loving.** Putting the **horse first.**

Helping clients **discover** their own wisdom and worth. Has frames of reference from **body of knowledge, Experience of facilitating groups –** positioning, holding a presence, how questions are asked. being authentic, light, playful. **experience of pain and personal learning** shapes practice as a facilitator. **experience** of working with organizations also shaped practice

**Role of Horse:** Catalyst for exploring fear and other emotions. Amplify client's energetic resonance, more information available with horse present. Observing their responses to guide the facilitator's choices. The horse exchanges energy, love and wisdom in their own right

**Role of Facilitator: Help clients** to **be present and aware** then **work** physically **with emotions as information**. **Hold a safe space** – confidentiality. **Observe the observers**, **work with what emerges** as it emerges for each person. Offer observations to **raise awareness** in the here and now. **Familiarity** - Connect here and now with work. **Naming patterns. Raise awareness** of body. **Directive Structuring:** Suggest ways to experience something different physically. **Compassion** and **understanding** of emotions. **Courage** to follow the client's intuition. **Holding a space :** confidential, safe, non-judgmental, for interaction with horse. Supporting client knowing self through interaction with the horse. **Encouraging** – to express their truth, to make sense for themselves. **Guiding:** simple inquiry, clean language, trying something to create a different experience. **Connecting** with their physical experience and access emotions. **Sense making:** connecting with what is familiar, make sense for themselves, but also through the body. **Guided:** by the horse and own physical sensations and intuitions. **Observing** the minutiae of body language, horse and human. **Support:** when client is experiencing the emotional arousal and when it has been released. **Observing:** where is the horse on the sympathetic/para cycle. **Challenge:** if the horse Has not released and but the client thinks they're done, challenge them to stay with it. **Intuition:** being in touch with own physical sense of what is happening with client. **Directing:** creating a different physical experience to precipitate an emotional release or insight. Challenging: to help client gain insight. **Self-management:** noting internal response, staying curious. **Boundaries:** Time

**Self as Instrument**

**Self-care**: sit with horses, walk in nature, supervision, meditation and spiritual practices, reflective journaling. **Professional :** CPD, networks and keeping up to date with developments in leadership. **Developing horsemanship skills** to fine tune awareness of horses. Working energetically and physically and being aware of impact the work has on the horses

**Conceptual notes and life world participant 2**

His character comes through so strongly, honest and straight forward, Does not mince his words. If he thinks something is crap he will say so. The way he describes his, big I'm out of here moment and what he later goes on to describe as his 'I am' is fascinating. The theme of authenticity seems to run throughout, closely aligned with congruence. From an early age he acknowledges making decisions around career certainly, based on shutting someone else up, or something that was going to make him money. Whilst not described as such, it sounded like a mid-life crisis. Other experiences also seemed to have a 'this is me/not me' quality. From I can make a go of coaching or EAL to working with P as not me, can't work like that, Does not feel right. This seems to pervade his thinking about leadership, with the primary aim of each programme to connect leaders to a sense of their authentic self. A strongly held belief that from connection comes the ability to lead.

The other aspect that seems to permeate is respect for the individual. Whether that is the readiness of someone to tackle something, or just the language they are using. Not sure if its deeper than this, but it seemed that his experience with P, whilst profound, was more aversive than instructive. It sounded like P wasn't particularly respectful of the individuals' readiness for challenge, or that's how he experienced it. There does seem like a lot of emphasis put on respect, exaggerated to a degree. Is this just his experience whilst working with P, or has it tapped into some fundamental values? Either way, it does seem to shape a lot of his thinking and behaving. Interestingly he describes that as being totally present with someone; to be totally on their agenda perhaps, or certainly without ego.

His spiritual development also seems to take up an important place in his life. His connection to different types of energy to support him, how he grounds himself prior to doing the work, his self-care strategies, all have a spiritual element. What he describes as his 'I am' is perhaps implicitly, soul. The deepest, highest part of himself and others. When he describes falling in love with the participants, that is a sense of recognising them as spiritual beings. His parting words about wanting to connect with themselves, to know that they are amazing is an inherently positive, appreciative and to a degree spiritual perspective on people. No wonder he railed against the approach of P, who was more interested in making others confront their darkest aspects, not their lighter ones.

Throughout he is open to many interpretations and explanations, whilst still being able to say what his belief or map of the world is. Is this an indication of his developmental level? The pluralist? Open to many possibilities, seeing beyond traditional boundaries and assumptions?

**Theory of learning – themes by participant**

1
- **Presence** as a facilitator
- **Holding a space**
- **Attention on own felt sense**
- Experience with the **horse is central**
- Make sense ***with*** the client
- **Beyond ego** - ' it is not about you'
- **safety**

2
- **Clean language**
- Respectful
- **Work with what emerges** from the interaction with the horse
- **Simple, directive structuring** to enable stuff to emerge
- **Create an experience of difference**
- Protecting the **here and now** space
- The **being of the facilitator**
- **Self-aware, attentive, present**
- **Raising awareness** through feedback from the horse
- **Paying attention** to horse, human and own felt sense
- Not coming from a place of 'expert'
- Intent is to **connect clients with their bodies** and a felt sense of resourcefulness

**3**
- **Experienced facilitator** and therapist
- Physically, mentally and emotional **tuned in to self and horse**
- **Depth of self-awareness** and self-management
- Quality of **presence**
- Working **emergently** with what arises
- Emphasis on **raising awareness**
- Emotions as a particular focus
- **Able to vary** exercises and approach dependant on a number of factors
- **Intervening** simply and skilfully
- Maintain the **here and now**
- **Manage boundaries** to maintain psychological safety

4
- Experienced facilitators before EAL
- Micro-body language cues
- Self-awareness of facilitator
- Adaptable
- Holding tensions and choices
- Tiring and energising

5
- **Presence**
- **Being in the moment**
- Allowing
- Working with what **emerges**
- Holding own sense making **in service of the client's**
- **Use of felt sense** as a facilitator

6
- **Safety paramount** – physical and emotional
- Hierarchical **structuring**
- Valuing
- Confronting
- Feeling
- Meaning making
- **Intentional**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | • Difference between training and coaching | • **Interventions** as simple as a movement or an observation<br>• **Need to understand horse behaviour** but not over interpret<br>• Manage **tensions** | • Boundaried<br>• **Emergent within a safe container** |
| 7 | • **Safety and containment**<br>• Quality of attention and **presence**<br>• **Responsive** to the needs of the learners<br>• **In service of the learning**<br>• **Able to hold a safe space** and confront gently<br>• Clear reasons for how and when **intervene**<br>• **Contracting**<br>• Work **emergently**<br>• **Guided by the horse** as co-facilitator<br>• **Experimenting**<br>• **Focus on felt or experiential** level of sense making<br>• Able to support **processing of emotions**<br>• **Intuition and experience** | | |

**Themes and concepts by participant – theory of facilitation**

1
- **Presence** as a facilitator
- **Holding a space**
- **Attention on own felt sense**
- Experience with the **horse is central**
- Make sense ***with*** the client
- **Beyond ego** - ' it is not about you'
- **safety**

2
- **Clean language**
- Respectful
- **Work with what emerges** from the interaction with the horse
- **Simple, directive structuring** to enable stuff to emerge
- **Create an experience of difference**
- Protecting the **here and now** space
- The **being of the facilitator**
- **Self-aware, attentive, present**
- **Raising awareness** through feedback from the horse
- **Paying attention** to horse, human and own felt sense
- Not coming from a place of 'expert'
- Intent is to **connect clients with their bodies** and a felt sense of resourcefulness

**3**
- **Experienced facilitator** and therapist
- Physically, mentally and emotional **tuned in to self and horse**
- **Depth of self-awareness** and self-management
- Quality of **presence**
- Working **emergently** with what arises
- Emphasis on **raising awareness**
- Emotions as a particular focus
- **Able to vary** exercises and approach dependant on a number of factors
- **Intervening** simply and skilfully
- Maintain the **here and now**
- **Manage boundaries** to maintain psychological safety

4
- Experienced facilitators before EAL

5
- **Presence**
- **Being in the moment**

6
- **Safety paramount** – physical and emotional

- Micro-body language cues
- Self-awareness of facilitator
- Adaptable
- Holding tensions and choices
- Tiring and energising
- Difference between training and coaching

7

- **Safety and containment**
- Quality of attention and **presence**
- **Responsive** to the needs of the learners
- **In service of the learning**
- **Able to hold a safe space** and confront gently
- Clear reasons for how and when **intervene**
- **Contracting**
- Work **emergently**
- **Guided by the horse** as co-facilitator
- **Experimenting**
- **Focus on felt or experiential** level of sense making
- Able to support **processing of emotions**
- Allowing
- Working with what **emerges**
- Holding own sense making **in service of the client's**
- **Use of felt sense** as a facilitator
- **Interventions** as simple as a movement or an observation
- **Need to understand horse behaviour** but not over interpret
- Manage **tensions**
- Hierarchical **structuring**
- Valuing
- Confronting
- Feeling
- Meaning making
- **Intentional**
- Boundaried
- **Emergent within a safe container**

- **Intuition and experience**

# APPENDIX F: IAF FACILITATOR COMPETENCIES

## CORE FACILITATOR COMPETENCIES

### BACKGROUND

The International Association of Facilitators (IAF) is the worldwide professional body established to promote, support and advance the art and practice of professional facilitation through methods exchange, professional growth, practical research and collegial networking.
The Core Facilitator Competencies framework was developed over several years by the IAF with the support of its members and facilitators from all over the world. The competencies form the basic set of skills, knowledge, and behaviours that facilitators must have in order to be successful facilitating in a wide variety of environments.
In response to the needs of members and their clients, IAF also established the IAF Certified™ Professional Facilitator (CPF) designation. The CPF provides successful candidates with the professional credential IAF Certified™ Professional Facilitator. This credential is the leading indicator that a facilitator is competent in each of the core facilitator competencies.

### THE CORE COMPETENCIES

#### A. CREATE COLLABORATIVE CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

A1) Develop working partnerships

• Clarify mutual commitment

• Develop consensus on tasks, deliverables, roles & responsibilities

• Demonstrate collaborative values and processes such as in co-facilitation

A2) Design and customise applications to meet client needs

• Analyse organisational environment

• Diagnose client need

• Create appropriate designs to achieve intended outcomes

• Predefine a quality product & outcomes with client

A3) Manage multi-session events effectively

• Contract with client for scope and deliverables

• Develop event plan

• Deliver event successfully

• Assess / evaluate client satisfaction at all stages of the event or project

#### B. PLAN APPROPRIATE GROUP PROCESSES

B1) Select clear methods and processes that:

• Foster open participation with respect for client culture, norms and participant diversity

• Engage the participation of those with varied learning or thinking styles

• Achieve a high quality product or outcome that meets the client needs

B2) Prepare time and space to support group process

• Arrange physical space to support the purpose of the meeting

• Plan effective use of time

• Provide effective atmosphere and drama for sessions

C. CREATE AND SUSTAIN A PARTICIPATORY ENVIRONMENT

C1) Demonstrate effective participatory and interpersonal communication skills

• Apply a variety of participatory processes

• Demonstrate effective verbal communication skills

• Develop rapport with participants

• Practice active listening

• Demonstrate ability to observe and provide feedback to participants

C2) Honour and recognise diversity, ensuring inclusiveness

• Encourage positive regard for the experience and perception of all participants

• Create a climate of safety and trust

• Create opportunities for participants to benefit from the diversity of the group

• Cultivate cultural awareness and sensitivity

C3) Manage group conflict

• Help individuals identify and review underlying assumptions

• Recognise conflict and its role within group learning / maturity

• Provide a safe environment for conflict to surface

• Manage disruptive group behaviour

• Support the group through resolution of conflict

C4) Evoke group creativity

• Draw out participants of all learning/thinking styles

• Encourage creative thinking

• Accept all ideas

• Use approaches that best fit needs and abilities of the group

• Stimulate and tap group energy

D. GUIDE GROUP TO APPROPRIATE AND USEFUL OUTCOMES

D1) Guide the group with clear methods and processes

• Establish clear context for the session

• Actively listen, question and summarise to elicit the sense of the group

• Recognise tangents and redirect to the task

• Manage small and large group process

D2) Facilitate group self-awareness about its task

• Vary the pace of activities according to needs of group

• Identify information the group needs, and draw out data and insight from the group

• Help the group synthesise patterns, trends, root causes, frameworks for action

• Assist the group in reflection on its experience

D3) Guide the group to consensus and desired outcomes

• Use a variety of approaches to achieve group consensus

• Use a variety of approaches to meet group objectives

• Adapt processes to changing situations and needs of the group

• Assess and communicate group progress

• Foster task completion

E. BUILD AND MAINTAIN PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

E1) Maintain a base of knowledge

• Be knowledgeable in management, organisational systems and development, group development, psychology, and conflict resolution

• Understand dynamics of change

• Understand learning/ thinking theory

E2) Know a range of facilitation methods

• Understand problem solving and decision-making models

• Understand a variety of group methods and techniques

• Know consequences of misuse of group methods

• Distinguish process from task and content

• Learn new processes, methods, & models in support of client's changing/emerging needs

E3) Maintain professional standing

• Engage in ongoing study / learning related to our field

• Continuously gain awareness of new information in our profession

• Practice reflection and learning

• Build personal industry knowledge and networks

• Maintain certification

F. MODEL POSITIVE PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDE

F1) Practice self-assessment and self-awareness

• Reflect on behaviour and results

• Maintain congruence between actions and personal and professional values

• Modify personal behaviour / style to reflect the needs of the group

• Cultivate understanding of one's own values and their potential impact on work with clients

F2) Act with integrity

• Demonstrate a belief in the group and its possibilities

• Approach situations with authenticity and a positive attitude

• Describe situations as facilitator sees them and inquire into different views

• Model professional boundaries and ethics (as described in the IAF's Statement of Values and Code of Ethics)

F3) Trust group potential and model neutrality

• Honour the wisdom of the group

• Encourage trust in the capacity and experience of others

• Vigilant to minimize influence on group outcomes

• Maintain an objective, non-defensive, non-judgmental stance